THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

EUGENE THWING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VOLUME FOUR

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THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

THE BLUE CROSS

BETWEEN the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous—nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gayety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale gray jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a gray-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast, and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler. There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the gray jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe. For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.

Flambeau was in England. The police of three countries had tracked the great criminal at last from Ghent to Brussels, from Brussels to the Hook of Holland; and it

(From "The Innocence of Father Brown," by Gilbert K. Chesterton. Copyright, 1911, by Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., New York, and by Cassell & Co., Ltd., London, England.)

was conjectured that he would take some advantage of the unfamiliarity and confusion of the Eucharistic Congress, then taking place in London. Probably he would travel as some minor clerk or secretary connected with it; but, of course, Valentin could not be certain; nobody could be certain about Flambeau.

It is many years now since this colossus of crime suddenly ceased keeping the world in a turmoil; and when he ceased, as they said after the death of Rolland, there was a great quiet upon the earth. But in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser. Almost every morning the daily paper announced that he had escaped the consequences of one extraordinary crime by committing another. He was a Gascon of gigantic stature and bodily daring; and the wildest tales were told of his outbursts of athletic humor; how he turned the *juge d'instruction* upside down and stood him on his head, "to clear his mind"; how he ran down the Rue de Rivoli with a policeman under each arm. It is due to him to say that his fantastic physical strength was generally employed in such bloodless though undignified scenes; his real crimes were chiefly those of ingenious and wholesale robbery. But each of his thefts was almost a new sin, and would make a story by itself. It was he who ran the great Tyrolean Dairy Company in London, with no dairies, no cows, no carts, no milk, but with some thousand subscribers. These he served by the simple operation of moving the little milk cans outside people's doors to the doors of his own customers. It was he who had kept up an unaccountable and close correspondence with a young lady whose whole letter-bag was intercepted, by the extraordinary trick of photographing his messages infinitestimally small upon the slides of a microscope. A sweeping simplicity, however, marked many of his experiments. It is said that he once repainted all the numbers in a street in the dead of night merely to divert one traveler into a trap. It is quite certain that he invented a portable pillar-box, which he put up at corners in quiet suburbs on the chance of strangers

dropping postal orders into it. Lastly, he was known to be a startling acrobat; despite his huge figure, he could leap like a grasshopper and melt into the tree-tops like a monkey. Hence the great Valentin, when he set out to find Flambeau, was perfectly aware that his adventures would not end when he had found him.

But how was he to find him? On this the great Valentin's ideas were still in process of settlement.

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin's quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody that could be a disguised Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe. About the people on the boat he had already satisfied himself; and the people picked up at Harwich or on the journey limited themselves with certainty to six. There was a short railway official traveling up to the terminus, three fairly short market gardeners picked up two stations afterwards, one very short widow lady going up from a small Essex town, and a very short Roman Catholic priest going up from a small Essex village. When it came to the last case, Valentin gave it up and almost laughed. The little priest was so much the essence of those Eastern flats; he had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels, which he was quite incapable of collecting. The Eucharistic Congress had doubtless sucked out of their local stagnation many such creatures, blind and helpless, like moles disinterred. Valentin was a skeptic in the severe style of France, and could have no love for priests. But he could have pity for them, and this one might have provoked pity in anybody. He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket. He explained with a moon-calf simplicity to everybody in the carriage that he had to be careful, because he had something made

of real silver "with blue stones" in one of his brown-paper parcels. His quaint blending of Essex flatness with saintly simplicity continuously amused the Frenchman till the priest arrived (somehow) at Tottenham with all his parcels, and came back for his umbrella. When he did the last, Valentin even had the good nature to warn him not to take care of the silver by telling everybody about it. But to whomever he talked, Valentin kept his eye open for some one else; he looked out steadily for any one, rich or poor, male or female, who was well up to six feet; for Flambeau was four inches above it.

He alighted at Liverpool Street, however, quite conscientiously secure that he had not missed the criminal so far. He then went to Scotland Yard to regularize his position and arrange for help in case of need; he then lit another cigarette and went for a long stroll in the streets of London. As he was walking in the streets and squares beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint, quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness. The tall, flat houses round looked at once prosperous and uninhabited; the square of shrubbery in the center looked as deserted as a green Pacific islet. One of the four sides was much higher than the rest, like a dais; and the line of this side was broken by one of London's admirable accidents—a restaurant that looked as if it had strayed from Soho. It was an unreasonably attractive object, with dwarf plants in pots and long, striped blinds of lemon yellow and white. It stood specially high above the street, and in the usual patchwork way of London, a flight of steps from the street ran up to meet the front door almost as a fire-escape might run up to a first-floor window. Valentin stood and smoked in front of the yellow-white blinds and considered them long.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. I have seen both these things myself within the last few days. Nelson

does die in the instant of victory; and a man named Williams does quite accidentally murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen.

Aristide Valentin was unfathomably French; and the French intelligence is intelligence specially and solely. He was not "a thinking machine"; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only *is* a machine because it cannot think. But he was a thinking man, and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought. The French electrify the world not by starting any paradox, they electrify it by carrying out a truism. They carry a truism so far—as in the French Revolution. But exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles. Here he had no strong first principles. Flambeau had been missed at Harwich; and if he was in London at all, he might be anything from a tall tramp on Wimbledon Common to a tall toastmaster at the Hôtel Métropole. In such a naked state of nescience, Valentin had a view and a method of his own.

In such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases, when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places—banks, police stations, rendezvous—he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every *cul de sac*, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way. He defended this crazy course quite logically. He said that if one had a clue this was the worst way; but

if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued. Somewhere a man must begin, and it had better be just where another man might stop. Something about that flight of steps up to the shop, something about the quietude and quaintness of the restaurant, roused all the detective's rare romantic fancy and made him resolve to strike at random. He went up the steps, and sitting down at a table by the window, asked for a cup of black coffee.

It was half-way through the morning, and he had not breakfasted; the slight litter of other breakfasts stood about on the table to remind him of his hunger; and adding a poached egg to his order, he proceeded musingly to shake some white sugar into his coffee, thinking all the time about Flambeau. He remembered how Flambeau had escaped, once by a pair of nail scissors, and once by a house on fire; once by having to pay for an unstamped letter, and once by getting people to look through a telescope at a comet that might destroy the world. He thought his detective brain as good as the criminal's, which was true. But he fully realized the disadvantage. "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic," he said with a sour smile, and lifted his coffee cup to his lips slowly, and put it down very quickly. He had put salt in it.

He looked at the vessel from which the silvery powder had come; it was certainly a sugar-basin; as unmistakably meant for sugar as a champagne bottle for champagne. He wondered why they should keep salt in it. He looked to see if there were any more orthodox vessels. Yes; there were two salt-cellars quite full. Perhaps there was some specialty in the condiment in the salt-cellars. He tasted it; it was sugar. Then he looked round at the restaurant with a refreshed air of interest, to see if there were any other traces of that singular artistic taste which puts the sugar in the salt-cellars and the salt in the sugar-basin. Except for an odd splash of some dark fluid on one of the

white-papered walls, the whole place appeared neat, cheerful and ordinary. He rang the bell for the waiter.

When that official hurried up, fuzzy-haired and somewhat blear-eyed at that early hour, the detective (who was not without an appreciation of the simpler forms of humor) asked him to taste the sugar and see if it was up to the high reputation of the hotel. The result was that the waiter yawned suddenly and woke up.

"Do you play this delicate joke on your customers every morning?" inquired Valentin. "Does changing the salt and sugar never pall on you as a jest?"

The waiter, when this irony grew clearer, stammeringly assured him that the establishment had certainly no such intention; it must be a most curious mistake. He picked up the sugar-basin and looked at it; he picked up the salt-cellar and looked at that, his face growing more and more bewildered. At last he abruptly excused himself, and hurrying away, returned in a few seconds with the proprietor. The proprietor also examined the sugar-basin and then the salt-cellar; the proprietor also looked bewildered.

Suddenly the waiter seemed to grow inarticulate with a rush of words.

"I zink," he stuttered eagerly, "I zink it is those two clergymen."

"What two clergymen?"

"The two clergymen," said the waiter, "that threw soup at the wall."

"Threw soup at the wall?" repeated Valentin, feeling sure this must be some singular Italian metaphor.

"Yes, yes," said the attendant excitedly, and pointing at the dark splash on the white paper; "threw it over there on the wall."

Valentin looked his query at the proprietor, who came to his rescue with fuller reports.

"Yes, sir," he said, "it's quite true, though I don't suppose it has anything to do with the sugar and salt. Two clergymen came in and drank soup here very early, as soon as the shutters were taken down. They were both very quiet, respectable people; one of them paid the bill

and went out; the other, who seemed a slower coach altogether, was some minutes longer getting his things together. But he went at last. Only, the instant before he stepped into the street he deliberately picked up his cup, which he had only half emptied, and threw the soup slap on the wall. I was in the back room myself, and so was the waiter; so I could only rush out in time to find the wall splashed and the shop empty. It didn't do any particular damage, but it was confounded cheek; and I tried to catch the men in the street. They were too far off though; I only noticed they went round the next corner into Carstairs Street."

The detective was on his feet, hat settled and stick in hand. He had already decided that in the universal darkness of his mind he could only follow the first odd finger that pointed; and this finger was odd enough. Paying his bill and clashing the glass doors behind him, he was soon swinging round into the other street.

It was fortunate that even in such fevered moments his eye was cool and quick. Something in a shop-front went by him like a mere flash; yet he went back to look at it. The shop was a popular greengrocer and fruiterer's, an array of goods set out in the open air and plainly ticketed with their names and prices. In the two most prominent compartments were two heaps, of oranges and of nuts respectively. On the heap of nuts lay a scrap of cardboard, on which was written in bold, blue chalk, "Best tangerine oranges, two a penny." On the oranges was the equally clear and exact description, "Finest Brazil nuts, 4d. a lb." M. Valentin looked at these two placards and fancied he had met this highly subtle form of humor before, and that somewhat recently. He drew the attention of the red-faced fruiterer, who was looking rather sullenly up and down the street, to this inaccuracy in his advertisements. The fruiterer said nothing, but sharply put each card into its proper place. The detective, leaning elegantly on his walking-cane, continued to scrutinize the shop. At last he said, "Pray excuse my apparent irrelevance, my good sir, but I should like to ask you a ques-

tion in experimental psychology and the association of ideas."

The red-faced shopman regarded him with an eye of menace; but he continued gayly, swinging his cane, "Why," he pursued, "why are two tickets wrongly placed in a greengrocer's shop like a shovel hat that has come to London for a holiday? Or, in case I do not make myself clear, what is the mystical association which connects the idea of nuts marked as oranges with the idea of two clergymen, one tall and the other short?"

The eyes of the tradesman stood out of his head like a snail's; he really seemed for an instant likely to fling himself upon the stranger. At last he stammered angrily: "I don't know what you 'ave to do with it, but if you're one of their friends, you can tell 'em from me that I'll knock their silly 'eads off, parsons or no parsons, if they upset my apples again."

"Indeed?" asked the detective, with great sympathy. "Did they upset your apples?"

"One of 'em did," said the heated shopman; "rolled 'em all over the street. I'd 'ave caught the fool but for havin' to pick 'em up."

"Which way did these parsons go?" asked Valentin.

"Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square," said the other promptly.

"Thanks," replied Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman, and said: "This is urgent, constable; have you seen two clergymen in shovel hats?"

The policeman began to chuckle heavily. "I 'ave, sir; and if you arst me, one of 'em was drunk. He stood in the middle of the road that bewildered that—"

"Which way did they go?" snapped Valentin.

"They took one of them yellow buses over there," answered the man; "them that go to Hampstead."

Valentin produced his official card and said very rapidly: "Call up two of your men to come with me in pursuit," and crossed the road with such contagious energy that the ponderous policeman was moved to almost agile obedience.

In a minute and a half the French detective was joined on the opposite pavement by an inspector and a man in plain clothes.

"Well, sir," began the former, with smiling importance, "and what may—?"

Valentin pointed suddenly with his cane. "I'll tell you on the top of that omnibus," he said, and was darting and dodging across the tangle of the traffic. When all three sank panting on the top seats of the yellow vehicle, the inspector said: "We could go four times as quick in a taxi."

"Quite true," replied their leader placidly, "if we only had an idea of where we were going."

"Well, where *are* you going?" asked the other, staring.

Valentin smoked frowningly for a few seconds; then, removing his cigarette, he said: "If you *know* what a man's doing, get in front of him; but if you want to guess what he's doing, keep behind him. Stray when he strays; stop when he stops; travel as slowly as he. Then you may see what he saw and may act as he acted. All we can do is to keep our eyes skinned for a queer thing."

"What sort of queer thing do you mean?" asked the inspector.

"Any sort of queer thing," answered Valentin, and relapsed into obstinate silence.

The yellow omnibus crawled up the northern roads for what seemed like hours on end; the great detective would not explain further, and perhaps his assistants felt a silent and growing doubt of his errand. Perhaps, also, they felt a silent and growing desire for lunch, for the hours crept long past the normal luncheon hour, and the long roads of the North London suburbs seemed to shoot out into length after length like an infernal telescope. It was one of those journeys on which a man perpetually feels that now at last he must have come to the end of the universe, and then finds he has only come to the beginning of Tufnell Park. London died away in draggled taverns and dreary scrubs, and then was unaccountably born again in blazing high streets and blatant hotels. It was like

passing through thirteen separate vulgar cities all just touching each other. But though the winter twilight was already threatening the road ahead of them, the Parisian detective still sat silent and watchful, eyeing the frontage of the streets that slid by on either side. By the time they had left Camden Town behind, the policemen were nearly asleep; at least, they gave something like a jump as Valentin leaped erect, struck a hand on each man's shoulder, and shouted to the driver to stop.

They tumbled down the steps into the road without realizing why they had been dislodged; when they looked round for enlightenment they found Valentin triumphantly pointing his finger towards a window on the left side of the road. It was a large window, forming part of the long façade of a gilt and palatial public-house; it was the part reserved for respectable dining, and labeled "Restaurant." This window, like all the rest along the frontage of the hotel, was of frosted and figured glass; but in the middle of it was a big, black smash, like a star in the ice.

"Our cue at last," cried Valentin, waving his stick: "the place with the broken window."

"What window? What cue?" asked his principal assistant. "Why, what proof is there that this has anything to do with them?"

Valentin almost broke his bamboo stick with rage.

"Proof!" he cried. "Good God! the man is looking for proof! Why, of course, the chances are twenty to one that it has *nothing* to do with them. But what else can we do? Don't you see we must either follow one wild possibility or else go home to bed?" He banged his way into the restaurant, followed by his companions, and they were soon seated at a late luncheon at a little table, and looking at the star of smashed glass from the inside. Not that it was very informative to them even then.

"Got your window broken, I see," said Valentin to the waiter as he paid the bill.

"Yes, sir," answered the attendant, bending busily over the change, to which Valentin silently added an enormous

tip. The waiter straightened himself with mild but unmistakable animation.

"Ah, yes, sir," he said. "Very odd thing, that, sir."

"Indeed? Tell us about it," said the detective with careless curiosity.

"Well, two gents in black came in," said the waiter; "two of those foreign parsons that are running about. They had a cheap and quiet little lunch, and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just going out to join him when I looked at my change again and found he'd paid me more than three times too much. 'Here,' I says to the chap who was nearly out of the door, 'you've paid too much.' 'Oh,' he says, very cool, 'have we?' 'Yes,' I says, and picks up the bill to show him. Well, that was a knockout."

"What do you mean?" asked his interlocutor.

"Well, I'd have sworn on seven Bibles that I'd put 4s. on that bill. But now I saw I'd put 14s., as plain as paint."

"Well?" cried Valentin, moving slowly, but with burning eyes, "and then?"

"The parson at the door he says all serene, 'Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it'll pay for the window. 'What window?' I says. 'The one I'm going to break," he says, and smashed that blessed pane with his umbrella."

All three inquirers made an exclamation; and the inspector said under his breath, "Are we after escaped lunatics?" The waiter went on with some relish for the ridiculous story:

"I was so knocked silly for a second, I couldn't do anything. The man marched out of the place and joined his friend just around the corner. Then they went so quick up Bullock Street that I couldn't catch them, though I ran round the bars to do it."

"Bullock Street," said the detective, and shot up that thoroughfare as quickly as the strange couple he pursued.

Their journey now took them through bare brick ways like tunnels; streets with few lights and even with few windows; streets that seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere. Dusk was deepening, and

it was not easy even for the London policemen to guess in what exact direction they were treading. The inspector, however, was pretty certain that they would eventually strike some part of Hampstead Heath. Abruptly one bulging gas-lit window broke the blue twilight like a bull's-eye lantern; and Valentin stopped an instant before a little garish sweetstuff shop. After an instant's hesitation he went in; he stood amid the gaudy colors of the confectionery with entire gravity and bought thirteen chocolate cigars with a certain care. He was clearly preparing an opening; but he did not need one.

An angular, elderly young woman in the shop had regarded his elegant appearance with a merely automatic inquiry; but when she saw the door behind him blocked with the blue uniform of the inspector, her eyes seemed to wake up.

"Oh," she said, "if you've come about that parcel, I've sent it off already."

"Parcel!" repeated Valentin; and it was his turn to look inquiring.

"I mean the parcel the gentlemen left—the clergyman gentleman."

"For goodness' sake," said Valentin, leaning forward with his first real confession of eagerness, "for Heaven's sake tell us what happened exactly."

"Well," said the woman a little doubtfully, "the clergymen came in about half an hour ago and bought some peppermints and talked a bit, and then went off towards the Heath. But a second after, one of them runs back into the shop and says, 'Have I left a parcel?' Well, I looked everywhere and couldn't see one; so he says, 'Never mind; but if it should turn up, please post it to this address,' and he left me the address and a shilling for my trouble. And sure enough, though I thought I'd looked everywhere, I found he'd left a brown paper parcel, so I posted it to the place he said. I can't remember the address now; it was somewhere in Westminster. But as the thing seemed so important, I thought perhaps the police had come about it."

"So they have," said Valentin shortly. "Is Hampstead Heath near here?"

"Straight on for fifteen minutes," said the woman, "and you'll come right out on the open." Valentin sprang out of the shop and began to run. The other detectives followed him at a reluctant trot.

The street they threaded was so narrow and shut in by shadows that when they came out unexpectedly into the void common and vast sky they were startled to find the evening still so light and clear. A perfect dome of peacock-green sank into gold amid the blackening trees, and the dark violet distances. The glowing green tint was just deep enough to pick out in points of crystal one or two stars. All that was left of the daylight lay in a golden glitter across the edge of Hampstead and that popular hollow which is called the Vale of Heath. The holiday makers who roam this region had not wholly dispersed; a few couples sat shapelessly on benches; and here and there a distant girl still shrieked in one of the swings. The glory of heaven deepened and darkened around the sublime vulgarity of man; and standing on the slope and looking across the valley, Valentin beheld the thing which he sought.

Among the black and breaking groups in that distance was one especially black which did not break—a group of two figures clerically clad. Though they seemed as small as insects, Valentin could see that one of them was much smaller than the other. Though the other had a student's stoop and an inconspicuous manner, he could see that the man was well over six feet high. He shut his teeth and went forward, whirling his stick impatiently. By the time he had substantially diminished the distance and magnified the two black figures as in a vast microscope, he had perceived something else; something which startled him, and yet which he had somehow expected. Whoever was the tall priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the short one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little *curé* of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

Now, so far as this went, everything fitted in finally and rationally enough. Valentin had learned by his inquiries that morning that a Father Brown from Essex was bringing up a silver cross with sapphires, a relic of considerable value, to show some of the foreign priests at the congress. This undoubtedly was the "silver with blue stones"; and Father Brown undoubtedly was the little greenhorn in the train. Now there was nothing wonderful about the fact that what Valentin had found out Flambeau had also found out; Flambeau found out everything. Also there was nothing wonderful in the fact that when Flambeau heard of a sapphire cross he should try to steal it; that was the most natural thing in all natural history. And most certainly there was nothing wonderful about the fact that Flambeau should have it all his own way with such a silly sheep as the man with the umbrella and the parcels. He was the sort of man whom anybody could lead on a string to the North Pole; it was not surprising that an actor like Flambeau, dressed as another priest, could lead him to Hampstead Heath. So far the crime seemed clear enough; and while the detective pitied the priest for his helplessness, he almost despised Flambeau for condescending to so gullible a victim. But when Valentin thought of all that had happened in between, of all that had led him to his triumph, he racked his brains for the smallest rhyme or reason in it. What had the stealing of a blue-and-silver cross from a priest from Essex to do with chucking soup at wall paper? What had it to do with calling nuts oranges, or with paying for windows first and breaking them afterwards? He had come to the end of his chase; yet somehow he had missed the middle of it. When he failed (which was seldom), he had usually grasped the clue, but nevertheless missed the criminal. Here he had grasped the criminal, but still he could not grasp the clue.

The two figures that they followed were crawling like black flies across the huge green contour of a hill. They were evidently sunk in conversation, and perhaps did not notice where they were going; but they were certainly going to the wilder and more silent heights of the Heath.

As their pursuers gained on them, the latter had to use the undignified attitudes of the deer-stalker, to crouch behind clumps of trees and even to crawl prostrate in deep grass. By these ungainly ingenuities the hunters even came close enough to the quarry to hear the murmur of the discussion, but no word could be distinguished except the word "reason" recurring frequently in a high and almost childish voice. Once over an abrupt dip of land and a dense tangle of thickets, the detectives actually lost the two figures they were following. They did not find the trail again for an agonizing ten minutes, and then it led round the brow of a great dome of hill overlooking an amphitheater of rich and desolate sunset scenery. Under a tree in this commanding yet neglected spot was an old ramshackle wooden seat. On this seat sat the two priests still in serious speech together. The gorgeous green and gold still clung to the darkening horizon; but the dome above was turning slowly from peacock-green to peacock-blue, and the stars detached themselves more and more like solid jewels. Mutely motioning to his followers, Valentin contrived to creep up behind the big branching tree, and, standing there in deathly silence, heard the words of the strange priests for the first time.

After he had listened for a minute and a half, he was gripped by a devilish doubt. Perhaps he had dragged the two English policemen to the wastes of a nocturnal heath on an errand no saner than seeking figs on its thistles. For the two priests were talking exactly like priests, piously, with learning and leisure, about the most aerial enigmas of theology. The little Essex priest spoke the more simply, with his round face turned to the strengthening stars; the other talked with his head bowed, as if he were not even worthy to look at them. But no more innocently clerical conversation could have been heard in any white Italian cloister or black Spanish cathedral.

The first he heard was the tail of one of Father Brown's sentences, which ended: ". . . . what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible."

The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said:

"Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?"

"No," said the other priest; "reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason."

The other priest raised his austere face to the spangled sky and said:

"Yet who knows if in that infinite universe—?"

"Only infinite physically," said the little priest, turning sharply in his seat, "not infinite in the sense of escaping from the laws of truth."

Valentin behind his tree was tearing his finger-nails with silent fury. He seemed almost to hear the sniggers of the English detectives whom he had brought so far on a fantastic guess only to listen to the metaphysical gossip of two mild old parsons. In his impatience he lost the equally elaborate answer of the tall cleric, and when he listened again it was Father Brown who was speaking:

"Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal.' "

Valentin was just in the act of rising from his rigid and crouching attitude and creeping away as softly as might be, felled by the one great folly of his life. But something in the very silence of the tall priest made him stop until the latter spoke. When at last he did speak, he said simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:

"Well, I still think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head."

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:

"Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We're all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a straw doll."

The utterly unaltered voice and attitude added a strange violence to that shocking change of speech. But the guarder of the relic only seemed to turn his head by the smallest section of the compass. He seemed still to have a somewhat foolish face turned to the stars. Perhaps he had not understood. Or, perhaps, he had understood and sat rigid with terror.

"Yes," said the tall priest, in the same low voice and in the same still posture, "yes, I am Flambeau."

Then, after a pause, he said:

"Come, will you give me that cross?"

"No," said the other, and the monosyllable had an odd sound.

Flambeau suddenly flung off all his pontifical pretensions. The great robber leaned back in his seat and laughed low but long.

"No," he cried, "you won't give it me, you proud prelate. You won't give it me, you little celibate simpleton. Shall I tell you why you won't give it me? Because I've got it already in my own breast-pocket."

The small man from Essex turned what seemed to be a dazed face in the dusk, and said, with the timid eagerness of "The Private Secretary":

"Are—are you sure?"

Flambeau yelled with delight.

"Really, you're as good as a three-act farce," he cried. "Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel, and now, my friend, you've got the duplicate and I've got the jewels. An old dodge, Father Brown—a very old dodge."

"Yes," said Father Brown, and passed his hand through

his hair with the same strange vagueness of manner. "Yes, I've heard of it before."

The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.

"*You* have heard of it?" he asked. "Where have *you* heard of it?"

"Well, I mustn't tell you his name, of course," said the little man simply. "He was a penitent, you know. He had lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap's way of doing it at once."

"Began to suspect me?" repeated the outlaw with increased intensity. "Did you really have the gumption to suspect me just because I brought you up to this bare part of the heath?"

"No, no," said Father Brown with an air of apology. "You see, I suspected you when we first met. It's that little bulge up the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet."

"How in Tartarus," cried Flambeau, "did you ever hear of the spiked bracelet?"

"Oh, one's little flock, you know!" said Father Brown, arching his eyebrows rather blankly. "When I was a curate in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets. So, as I suspected you from the first, don't you see, I made sure that the cross should go safe, anyhow. I'm afraid I watched you, you know. So at last I saw you change the parcels. Then, don't you see, I changed them back again. And then I left the right one behind."

"Left it behind?" repeated Flambeau, and for the first time there was another note in his voice beside his triumph.

"Well, it was like this," said the little priest, speaking in the same unaffected way. "I went back to that sweet-shop and asked if I'd left a parcel, and gave them a particular address if it turned up. Well, I knew I hadn't; but when I went away again I did. So, instead of running after me with that valuable parcel, they have sent it flying

to a friend of mine in Westminster." Then he added rather sadly: "I learnt that, too, from a poor fellow in Hartlepool. He used to do it with handbags he stole at railway stations, but he's in a monastery now. Oh, one gets to know, you know," he added, rubbing his head again with the same sort of desperate apology. "We can't help being priests. People come and tell us these things."

Flambeau tore a brown paper parcel out of his inner pocket and rent it in pieces. There was nothing but paper and sticks of lead inside it. He sprang to his feet with a gigantic gesture, and cried:

"I don't believe you. I don't believe a bumpkin like you could manage all that. I believe you've still got the stuff on you, and if you don't give it up—why, we're all alone, and I'll take it by force!"

"No," said Father Brown simply, and stood up also, "you won't take it by force. First, because I really haven't still got it. And, second, because we are not alone."

Flambeau stopped in his stride forward.

"Behind that tree," said Father Brown, pointing, "are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them, of course! How did I do it? Why, I'll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes! Well, I wasn't sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn't, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and *you* kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and *you* paid it."

The world seemed waiting for Flambeau to leap like a tiger. But he was held back as by a spell; he was stunned with the utmost curiosity.

"Well," went on Father Brown, with lumbering lucidity "as you wouldn't leave any tracks for the police, of course

somebody had to. At every place we went to, I took care to do something that would get us talked about for the rest of the day. I didn't do much harm—a splashed wall, spilt apples, a broken window; but I saved the cross, as the cross will always be saved. It is at Westminster by now. I rather wonder you didn't stop it with the Donkey's Whistle."

"With the what?" asked Flambeau.

"I'm glad you've never heard of it," said the priest, making a face. "It's a foul thing. I'm sure you're too good a man for a Whistler. I couldn't have countered it even with the Spots myself; I'm not strong enough in the legs."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the other.

"Well, I did think you'd know the Spots," said Father Brown, agreeably surprised. "Oh, you can't have gone so very wrong yet!"

"How in blazes do you know all these horrors?" cried Flambeau.

The shadow of a smile crossed the round, simple face of his clerical opponent.

"Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose," he said. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest."

"What?" asked the thief, almost gaping.

"You attacked reason," said Father Brown. "It's bad theology."

And even as he turned away to collect his property, the three policemen came out from under the twilight trees. Flambeau was an artist and a sportsman. He stepped back and swept Valentin a great bow.

"Do not bow to me, *mon ami*," said Valentin with silver clearness. "Let us both bow to our master."

And they both stood an instant uncovered while the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella.

GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

THE PARADISE OF THIEVES

The great Muscari, most original of the young Tuscan poets, walked swiftly into his favourite restaurant, which overlooked the Mediterranean, was covered by an awning and fenced by little lemon and orange trees. Waiters in white aprons were already laying out on white tables the insignia of an early and elegant lunch; and this seemed to increase a satisfaction that already touched the top of swagger. Muscari had an eagle nose like Dante, his hair and neckerchief were dark and flowing; he carried a black cloak, and might almost have carried a black mask, so much did he bear with him a sort of Venetian melodrama. He acted as if a troubadour had still a definite social office, like a bishop. He went as near as his century permitted to walking the world literally like Don Juan, with rapier and guitar.

For he never travelled without a case of swords, with which he had fought many brilliant duels, or without a corresponding case of his mandolin, with which he had actually serenaded Miss Ethel Harrogate, the highly-conventional daughter of a Yorkshire banker, on a holiday. Yet he was neither a charlatan nor a child; but a hot, logical Latin who liked a certain thing and was it. His poetry was as straightforward as anyone else's prose. He desired fame or wine or the beauty of women with a torrid directness inconceivable among the cloudy ideals or cloudy compromises of the north; to vaguer races his intensity smelt of danger or even crime. Like fire or the sea, he was too simple to be trusted.

(From "The Wisdom of Father Brown," by Gilbert K. Chesterton. Copyright, 1914, by Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., New York, and by Cassell & Co., Ltd., London, England.)

The banker and his beautiful English daughter were staying at the hotel attached to Muscari's restaurant; that was why it was his favourite restaurant. A glance flashed round the room told him at once, however, that the English party had not descended. The restaurant was glittering, but still comparatively empty. Two priests were talking at a table in a corner, but Muscari (an ardent Catholic) took no more notice of them than of a couple of crows. But from a yet farther seat, partly concealed behind a dwarf tree golden with oranges, there rose and advanced towards the poet a person whose costume was the most aggressive opposite to his own.

This figure was clad in tweeds of a piebald check, with a pink tie, a sharp collar and protuberant yellow boots. He contrived, in the true tradition of 'Arry at Margate, to look at once startling and commonplace. But as the Cockney apparition drew nearer, Muscari was astounded to observe that the head was distinctly different from the body. It was an Italian head, fuzzy, swarthy and very vivacious, that rose abruptly out of the standing collar like cardboard and the comic pink tie. In fact it was a head he knew. He recognised it, above all the dire erection of English holiday array, as the face of an old but forgotten friend named Ezza. This youth had been a prodigy at college, and European fame was promised him when he was barely fifteen; but when he appeared in the world he failed, first publicly as a dramatist and a demagogue, and then privately for years on end as an actor, a traveller, a commission agent or a journalist. Muscari had known him last behind the footlights; he was but too well attuned to the excitements of that profession, and it was believed that some moral calamity had swallowed him up.

"Ezza!" cried the poet, rising and shaking hands in a pleasant astonishment. "Well, I've seen you in many costumes in the green room; but I never expected to see you dressed up as an Englishman."

"This," answered Ezza gravely, "is not the costume of an Englishman, but of the Italian of the future."

"In that case," remarked Muscari, "I confess I prefer the Italian of the past."

"That is your old mistake, Muscari," said the man in tweeds, shaking his head. "And the mistake of Italy. In the sixteenth century we Tuscans made the morning: we had the newest steel, the newest carving, the newest chemistry. Why should we not now have the newest factories, the newest motors, the newest finance—and the newest clothes?"

"Because they are not worth having," answered Muscari. "You cannot make Italians really progressive; they are too intelligent. Men who see the short cut to good living will never go by the new elaborate roads."

"Well, to me Marconi, not D'Annunzio, is the star of Italy," said the other. "That is why I have become a Futurist—and a courier."

"A courier!" cried Muscari, laughing. "Is that the last of your list of trades? And whom are you conducting?"

"Oh, a man of the name of Harrogate, and his family, I believe."

"Not the banker in this hotel?" inquired the poet, with some eagerness.

"That's the man," answered the courier.

"Does it pay well?" asked the troubadour innocently.

"It will pay me," said Ezza, with a very enigmatic smile. "But I am a rather curious sort of courier." Then, as if changing the subject, he said abruptly, "He has a daughter—and a son."

"The daughter is divine," affirmed Muscari, "the father and son are, I suppose, human. But granted his harmless qualities, doesn't that banker strike you as a splendid instance of my argument? Harrogate has millions in his safes, and I have—the hole in my pocket. But you daren't say—you can't say—that he's cleverer than I, or bolder than I, or even more energetic. He's not clever; he's got eyes like blue buttons; he's not energetic, he moves from chair to chair like a paralytic. He's a conscientious, kindly old blockhead; but he's got money simply because he collects money, as a boy collects stamps. You're too strong-

minded for business, Ezza. You won't get on. To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it."

"I'm stupid enough for that," said Ezza gloomily. "But I should suggest a suspension of your critique of the banker, for here he comes."

Mr. Harrogate, the great financier, did indeed enter the room, but nobody looked at him. He was a massive elderly man with a boiled blue eye and faded grey-sandy moustaches; but for his heavy stoop he might have been a colonel. He carried several unopened letters in his hand. His son Frank was a really fine lad, curly haired, sunburnt and strenuous; but nobody looked at him either. All eyes, as usual, were riveted, for the moment at least, upon Ethel Harrogate, whose golden Greek head and colour of the dawn seemed set purposely above that sapphire sea, like a goddess's. The poet Muscari drew a deep breath as if he were drinking something; as indeed he was. He was drinking the Classic; which his fathers made. Ezza studied her with a gaze equally intense and far more baffling.

Miss Harrogate was specially radiant and ready for conversation on this occasion; and her family had fallen into the easier Continental habit, allowing the stranger Muscari and even the courier Ezza to share their table and their talk. In Ethel Harrogate conventionality crowned itself with a perfection and splendour of its own. Proud of her father's prosperity, fond of her fashionable pleasures, a fond daughter but an arrant flirt, she was all these things with a sort of golden good-nature that made her very pride pleasing and her worldly respectability a fresh and hearty thing.

They were in an eddy of excitement about some alleged peril in the mountain path they were to attempt that week. The danger was not from rock and avalanche, but from something yet more romantic. Ethel had been earnestly assured that brigands, the true cutthroats of the modern legend, still haunted that ridge and held that pass of the Apennines.

"They say," she cried, with the awful relish of a school-

girl, "that all that country isn't ruled by the King of Italy, but by the King of Thieves. Who is the King of Thieves?"

"A great man," replied Muscari, "worthy to rank with your own Robin Hood, signorina. Montano, the King of Thieves, was first heard of in the mountains some ten years ago, when people said brigands were extinct. But his wild authority spread with the swiftness of a silent revolution. Men found his fierce proclamations nailed in every mountain village; his sentinels, gun in hand, in every mountain ravine. Six times the Italian Government tried to dislodge him; and was defeated in six pitched battles as if by Napoleon."

"Now that sort of thing," observed the banker weightily, "would never be allowed in England; perhaps after all we had better choose another route. But the courier thought it perfectly safe."

"It is perfectly safe," said the courier contemptuously; "I have been over it twenty times. There may have been some old jail-bird called a King in the time of our grandmothers; but he belongs to history, if not to fable. Brigandage is utterly stamped out."

"It can never be utterly stamped out," Muscari answered, "because armed revolt is a reaction natural to southerners. Our peasants are like the mountains, rich in grace and green gaiety, but with the fires beneath. There is a point of human despair where the northern poor take to drink—and our own poor take to daggers."

"A poet is privileged," replied Ezza, with a sneer. "If Signor Muscari were English he would still be looking for highwaymen in Wandsworth. Believe me, there is no more danger of being captured in Italy than of being scalped in Boston."

"Then you propose to attempt it?" asked Mr. Harrogate, frowning.

"Oh, it sounds rather dreadful," cried the girl, turning her glorious eyes on Muscari. "Do you really think the pass is dangerous?"

Muscari threw back his black mane. "I know it is dangerous," he said. "I am crossing it to-morrow."

The young Harrogate was left behind for a moment, emptying a glass of white wine and lighting a cigarette, as the beauty retired with the banker, the courier and the poet, distributing peals of silvery satire. At about the same instant the two priests in the corner rose; the taller, a white-haired Italian, taking his leave. The shorter priest turned and walked towards the banker's son; and the latter was astonished to realise that though a Roman priest the man was an Englishman. He vaguely remembered meeting the priest at the social crushes of some of his Catholic friends. But the man spoke before his memories could collect themselves.

"Mr. Frank Harrogate, I think," he said. "I have had an introduction, but I do not mean to presume on it. The odd thing I have to say will come far better from a stranger. Mr. Harrogate, I say one word and go: take care of your sister in her great sorrow."

Even for Frank's truly fraternal indifference the radiance and derision of his sister still seemed to sparkle and ring; he could hear her laughter still from the garden of the hotel; and he stared at his sombre adviser in puzzledom.

"Do you mean the brigands?" he asked, and then, remembering a vague fear of his own, "or can you be thinking of Muscari?"

"One is never thinking of the real sorrow," said the strange priest. "One can only be kind when it comes."

And he passed promptly from the room, leaving the other almost with his mouth open.

A day or two afterwards a coach containing the company was really crawling and staggering up the spurs of the menacing mountain range. Between Ezza's cheery denial of the danger and Muscari's boisterous defiance of it, the financial family were firm in their original purpose; and Muscari made his mountain journey coincide with theirs. A more surprising feature was the appearance at the coast-town station of the little priest of the restaurant; he alleged merely that business led him also to cross the mountains of the midland. But young Harrogate could

not but connect his presence with the mystical fears and warnings of yesterday.

The coach was a kind of commodious wagonette, invented by the modernist talent of the courier, who dominated the expedition with his scientific activity and breezy wit. The theory of danger from thieves was banished from thought and speech; though so far conceded in formal act that some slight protection was employed. The courier and the young banker carried loaded revolvers, and Muscari (with much boyish gratification) buckled on a kind of cutlass under his black cloak.

He had planted his person at a flying leap next to the lovely Englishwoman; on the other side of her sat the priest, whose name was Brown and who was fortunately a silent individual; the courier and the father and son were on the *banc* behind. Muscari was in towering spirits, seriously believing in the peril, and his talk to Ethel might well have made her think him a maniac. But there was something in the crazy and gorgeous ascent, amid crags like peaks loaded with woods like orchards. that dragged her spirit up along with his into purple preposterous heavens, with wheeling suns. The white road climbed like a white cat; it spanned sunless chasms like a tightrope; it was flung round far-off headlands like a lasso.

And yet however high they went, the desert still blossomed like the rose. The fields were burnished in sun and wind with the colour of kingfisher and parrot and humming-bird; the hues of a hundred flowering flowers. There are no lovelier meadows and woodlands than the English; no nobler crests or chasms than those of Snowdon and Glencoe. But Ethel Harrogate had never before seen the southern parks tilted on the splintered northern peaks; the gorge of Glencoe laden with the fruits of Kent. There was nothing here of that chill and desolation that in Britain one associates with high and wild scenery. It was rather like a mosaic palace, rent with earthquakes; or like a Dutch tulip garden blown to the stars with dynamite.

"It's like Kew Gardens on Beachy Head," said Ethel.

"It is our secret," answered he, "the secret of the vol-

cano; that is also the secret of the revolution—that a thing can be violent and yet fruitful."

"You are rather violent yourself," and she smiled at him.

"And yet rather fruitless," he admitted; "if I die to-night I die unmarried and a fool."

"It is not my fault if you have come," she said after a difficult silence.

"It is never your fault," answered Muscari; "it was not your fault that Troy fell."

As he spoke they came under overwhelming cliffs that spread almost like wings above a corner of peculiar peril. Shocked by the big shadow on the narrow ledge, the horses stirred doubtfully. The driver leapt to the earth to hold their heads, and they became ungovernable. One horse reared up to his full height—the titanic and terrifying height of a horse when he becomes a biped. It was just enough to alter the equilibrium; the whole coach heeled over like a ship and crashed through the fringe of bushes over the cliff. Muscari threw an arm round Ethel, who clung to him, and shouted aloud. It was for such moments that he lived.

At the moment when the gorgeous mountain walls went round the poet's head like a purple windmill, a thing happened which was superficially even more startling. The elderly and lethargic banker sprang erect in the coach and leapt over the precipice before the tilted vehicle could take him there. In the first flash it looked as wild as suicide; but in the second it was as sensible as a safe investment. The Yorkshireman had evidently more promptitude as well as more sagacity than Muscari had given him credit for. For he landed in a lap of land which might have been specially padded with turf and clover to receive him. As it happened, indeed, the whole company were equally lucky, if less dignified in their form of ejection. Immediately under this abrupt turn of the road was a grassy and flowery hollow like a sunken meadow; a sort of green velvet pocket in the long, green, trailing garments of the hills. Into this they were all tipped or tumbled with

little damage, save that their smallest baggage and even the contents of their pockets were scattered in the grass around them. The wrecked coach still hung above, entangled in the tough hedge, and the horses plunged painfully down the slope. The first to sit up was the little priest, who scratched his head with a face of foolish wonder; Frank Harrogate heard him say to himself, "Now why on earth have we fallen just here?"

He blinked at the litter around him, and recovered his own very clumsy umbrella. Beyond it lay the broad sombrero fallen from the head of Muscari, and beside it a sealed business letter which, after a glance at the address, he returned to the elder Harrogate. On the other side of him the grass partly hid Miss Ethel's sunshade, and just beyond it lay a curious little glass bottle hardly two inches long. The priest picked it up; in a quick, unobtrusive manner he uncorked and sniffed it, and his heavy face turned the colour of clay.

"Heaven deliver us!" he muttered, "it can't be hers! Has her sorrow come on her already?" He slipped it into his own waistcoat pocket. "I think I'm justified," he said, "till I know a little more."

He gazed painfully at the girl, at that moment being raised out of the flowers by Muscari, who was saying, "We have fallen into heaven; it is a sign. Mortals climb up and they fall down; but it is only gods and goddesses who can fall upwards."

And indeed she rose out of the sea of colours so beautiful and happy a vision that the priest felt his suspicion shaken and shifted. "After all," he thought, "perhaps the poison isn't hers; perhaps it's one of Muscari's melodramatic tricks."

Muscari set the lady lightly on her feet, made her an absurdly theatrical bow, and then, drawing his cutlass, hacked hard at the taut reins of the horses, so that they scrambled to their feet and stood in the grass trembling. When he had done so a most remarkable thing occurred. A very quiet man, very poorly dressed and extremely sunburnt, came out of the bushes and took hold of the horses'

heads. He had a queer-shaped knife, very broad and crooked, buckled on his belt; there was nothing else remarkable about him, except his sudden and silent appearance. The poet asked him who he was, and he did not answer.

Looking around him at the confused and startled group in the hollow, Muscari then perceived that another tanned and tattered man, with a short gun under his arm, was looking at them from the ledge just below, leaning his elbows on the edge of the turf. Then he looked up at the road from which they had fallen and saw, looking down on them, the muzzles of four other carbines and four other brown faces with bright but quite motionless eyes.

"The brigands!" cried Muscari, with a kind of monstrous gaiety. "This was a trap. Ezza, if you will oblige me by shooting the coachman first, we can cut our way out yet. There are only six of them."

"The coachman," said Ezza, who was standing grimly with his hands in his pockets, "happens to be a servant of Mr. Harrogate's."

"Then shoot him all the more," cried the poet impatiently; "he was bribed to upset his master. Then put the lady in the middle, and we will break the line up there—with a rush."

And, wading in wild grass and flowers, he advanced fearlessly on the four carbines; but finding that no one followed except young Harrogate, he turned, brandishing his cutlass to wave the others on. He beheld the courier still standing slightly astride in the centre of the grassy ring, his hands in his pockets; and his lean, ironical Italian face seemed to grow longer and longer in the evening light.

"You thought, Muscari, I was the failure among our schoolfellows," he said, "and you thought you were the success. But I have succeeded more than you and fill a bigger place in history. I have been acting epics while you have been writing them."

"Come on, I tell you!" thundered Muscari from above. "Will you stand there talking nonsense about yourself with

a woman to save and three strong men to help you? What do you call yourself?"

"I call myself Montano," cried the strange courier in a voice equally loud and full. "I am the King of Thieves, and I welcome you all to my summer palace."

And even as he spoke five more silent men with weapons ready came out of the bushes, and looked towards him for their orders. One of them held a large paper in his hand.

"This pretty little nest where we are all picnicking," went on the courier-brigand, with the same easy yet sinister smile, "is, together with some caves underneath it, known by the name of the Paradise of Thieves. It is my principal stronghold on these hills; for (as you have doubtless noticed) the eyrie is invisible both from the road above and from the valley below. It is something better than impregnable; it is unnoticeable. Here I mostly live, and here I shall certainly die, if the gendarmes ever track me here. I am not the kind of criminal that 'reserves his defence,' but the better kind that reserves his last bullet."

All were staring at him thunderstruck and still, except Father Brown, who heaved a huge sigh as of relief and fingered the little phial in his pocket. "Thank God!" he muttered, "that's much more probable. The poison belongs to this robber-chief, of course. He carries it so that he may never be captured, like Cato."

The King of Thieves was, however, continuing his address with the same kind of dangerous politeness. "It only remains for me," he said, "to explain to my guests the social conditions upon which I have the pleasure of entertaining them. I need not expound the quaint old ritual of ransom, which it is incumbent upon me to keep up; and even this only applies to a part of the company. The Reverend Father Brown and the celebrated Signor Muscari I shall release to-morrow at dawn and escort to my outposts. Poets and priests, if you will pardon my simplicity of speech, never have any money. And so (since it is impossible to get anything out of them), let us

seize the opportunity to show our admiration for classic literature and our reverence for Holy Church."

He paused with an unpleasing smile; and Father Brown blinked repeatedly at him, and seemed suddenly to be listening with great attention. The brigand captain took the large paper from the attendant brigand and, glancing it over, continued: "My other intentions are clearly set forth in this public document, which I will hand round in a moment; and which after that will be posted on a tree by every village in the valley, and every cross-road in the hills. I will not weary you with the verbalism, since you will be able to check it; the substance of my proclamation is this. I announce first that I have captured the English millionaire, the colossus of finance, Mr. Samuel Harrogate. I next announce that I have found on his person notes and bonds for two thousand pounds, which he has given up to me. Now since it would be really immoral to announce such a thing to a credulous public if it had not occurred, I suggest it should occur without further delay. I suggest that Mr. Harrogate senior should now give me the two thousand pounds in his pocket."

The banker looked at him under lowering brows, red-faced and sulky, but seemingly cowed. That leap from the falling carriage seemed to have used up his last virility. He had held back in a hang-dog style when his son and Muscari had made a bold movement to break out of the brigand trap. And now his red and trembling hand went reluctantly to his breast-pocket, and passed a bundle of papers and envelopes to the brigand.

"Excellent!" cried that outlaw gaily, "so far we are all cosy. I resume the points of my proclamation, so soon to be published to all Italy. The third item is that of ransom. I am asking from the friends of the Harrogate family a ransom of three thousand pounds; which I am sure is almost insulting to that family in its moderate estimate of their importance. Who would not pay triple this sum for another day's association with such a domestic circle? I will not conceal from you that the document ends with certain legal phrases about the unpleasant things that may

happen if the money is not paid; but meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you that I am comfortably off here for accommodation, wine and cigars, and bid you for the present a sportsmanlike welcome to the luxuries of the Paradise of Thieves."

All the time that he had been speaking the dubious-looking men with carbines and dirty slouch hats had been gathering silently in such preponderating numbers that even Muscari was compelled to recognise his sally with the sword as hopeless. He glanced around him; but the girl had already gone over to soothe and comfort her father, for her natural affection for his person was as strong or stronger than her somewhat snobbish pride in his success. Muscari, with the illogicality of a lover, admired this filial devotion and yet was irritated by it. He slapped his sword back in the scabbard and went and flung himself somewhat sulkily on one of the green banks. The priest sat down within a yard or two, and Muscari turned his aquiline eye and nose on him in an instantaneous irritation.

"Well," said the poet tartly, "do people still think me too romantic? Are there, I wonder, any brigands left in the mountains?"

"There may be," said Father Brown agnostically.

"What do you mean?" asked the other sharply.

"I mean I am puzzled," replied the priest. "I am puzzled about Ezza or Montano or whatever his name is. He seems to me much more inexplicable as a brigand even than he was as a courier."

"But in what way?" persisted his companion. "Santa Maria! I should have thought the brigand was plain enough."

"I find three curious difficulties," said the priest in a quiet voice. "I should like to have your opinion on them. First of all I must tell you I was lunching in that restaurant at the seaside. As four of you left the room, you and Miss Harrogate went ahead, talking and laughing; the banker and the courier came behind, speaking sparely and rather low. But I could not help hearing Ezza say these

words—'Well, let her have a little fun; you know the blow may smash her any minute.' Mr. Harrogate answered nothing; so the words must have had some meaning. On the impulse of the moment I warned her brother that she might be in peril; I said nothing of its nature, for I did not know. But if it meant this capture in the hills, the thing is nonsense. Why should the brigand-courier warn his patron, even by a hint, when it was his whole purpose to lure him into the mountain-mousetrap? It could not have meant that. But if not, what is this other disaster, known both to courier and banker, which hangs over Miss Harrogate's head?"

"Disaster to Miss Harrogate!" ejaculated the poet, sitting up with some ferocity. "Explain yourself; go on."

"All my riddles, however, revolve round our bandit chief," resumed the priest reflectively. "And here is the second of them. Why did he put so prominently in his demand for ransom the fact that he had taken two thousand pounds from his victim on the spot? It had no faintest tendency to evoke the ransom. Quite the other way, in fact. Harrogate's friends would be far likelier to fear for his fate if they thought the thieves were poor and desperate. Yet the spoliation on the spot was emphasised and even put first in the demand. Why should Ezza Montano want so specially to tell all Europe that he had picked the pocket before he levied the blackmail?"

"I cannot imagine," said Muscari, rubbing up his black hair for once with an unaffected gesture. "You may think you enlighten me, but you are leading me deeper in the dark. What may be the third objection to the King of the Thieves?"

"The third objection," said Father Brown, still in meditation, "is this bank we are sitting on. Why does our brigand-courier call this his chief fortress and the Paradise of Thieves? It is certainly a soft spot to fall on and a sweet spot to look at. It is also quite true, as he says, that it is invisible from valley and peak, and is therefore a hiding-place. But it is not a fortress. It never could be a fortress. I think it would be the worst fortress in the

world. For it is actually commanded from above by the common high-road across the mountains—the very place where the police would most probably pass. Why, five shabby short guns held us helpless here about half an hour ago. The quarter of a company of any kind of soldiers could have blown us over the precipice. Whatever is the meaning of this odd little nook of grass and flowers, it is not an entrenched position. It is something else; it has some other strange sort of importance; some value that I do not understand. It is more like an accidental theatre or a natural green-room; it is like the scene for some romantic comedy; it is like . . ."

As the little priest's words lengthened and lost themselves in a dull and dreamy sincerity, Muscari, whose animal senses were alert and impatient, heard a new noise in the mountains. Even for him the sound was as yet very small and faint; but he could have sworn the evening breeze bore with it something like the pulsation of horses' hoofs and a distant halloing.

At the same moment, and long before the vibration had touched the less-experienced English ears, Montano the brigand ran up the bank above them and stood in the broken hedge, steadying himself against a tree and peering down the road. He was a strange figure as he stood there; for he had assumed a flapped fantastic hat and swinging baldric and cutlass in his capacity of bandit king, but the bright prosaic tweed of the courier showed through in patches all over him.

The next moment he turned his olive, sneering face and made a movement with his hand. The brigands scattered at the signal, not in confusion, but in what was evidently a kind of guerilla discipline. Instead of occupying the road along the ridge, they sprinkled themselves along the side of it behind the trees and the hedge, as if watching unseen for an enemy. The noise beyond grew stronger, beginning to shake the mountain road; and a voice could be clearly heard calling out orders. The brigands swayed and huddled, cursing and whispering, and the evening air was full of little metallic noises as they cocked their

pistols or loosened their knives or trailed their scabbards over the stones. Then the noises from both quarters seemed to meet on the road above; branches broke, horses neighed, men cried out.

"A rescue!" cried Muscari, springing to his feet and waving his hat: "the gendarmes are on them! Now for freedom and a blow for it! Now to be rebels against robbers! Come, don't let us leave everything to the police; that is so dreadfully modern. Fall on the rear of these ruffians. The gendarmes are rescuing us; come, friends, let us rescue the gendarmes!"

And throwing his hat over the trees, he drew his cutlass once more and began to escalade the slope up to the road. Frank Harrogate jumped up and ran across to help him, revolver in hand, but was astounded to hear himself imperatively recalled by the raucous voice of his father, who seemed to be in great agitation.

"I won't have it," said the banker in a choking voice; "I command you not to interfere."

"But, father," said Frank very warmly, "an Italian gentleman has led the way. You wouldn't have it said that the English hung back."

"It is useless," said the older man, who was trembling violently, "it is useless. We must submit to our lot."

Father Brown looked at the banker; then he put his hand instinctively as if on his heart, but really on the little bottle of poison; and a great light came into his face like the light of the revelation of death.

Muscari meanwhile, without waiting for support, had crested the bank up to the road, and struck the brigand king heavily on the shoulder, causing him to stagger and swing round. Montano also had his cutlass unsheathed, and Muscari, without further speech, sent a slash at his head which he was compelled to catch and parry. But even as the two short blades crossed and clashed the King of Thieves deliberately dropped his point and laughed.

"What's the good, old man?" he said in spirited Italian slang; "this damned farce will soon be over."

"What do you mean, you shuffler?" panted the fire-eating poet. "Is your courage a sham as well as your honesty?"

"Everything about me is a sham," responded the ex-courier in complete good-humour. "I am an actor; and if I ever had a private character, I have forgotten it. I am no more a genuine brigand than I am a genuine courier. I am only a bundle of masks, and you can't fight a duel with that." And he laughed with boyish pleasure and fell into his old straddling attitude, with his back to the skirmish up the road.

Darkness was deepening under the mountain walls, and it was not easy to discern much of the progress of the struggle, save that tall men were pushing their horses' nozzles through a clinging crowd of brigands, who seemed more inclined to harass and hustle the invaders than to kill them. It was more like a town crowd preventing the passage of the police than anything the poet had ever pictured as the last stand of doomed and outlawed men of blood. Just as he was rolling his eyes in bewilderment, he felt a touch on his elbow, and found the odd little priest standing there like a small Noah with a large hat, and requesting the favour of a word or two.

"Signor Muscari," said the clerk, "in this queer crisis personalities may be pardoned. I may tell you without offence of a way in which you will do more good than by helping the gendarmes, who are bound to break through in any case. You will permit me the impertinent intimacy; but do you care about that girl? Care enough to marry her and make her a good husband, I mean?"

"Yes," said the poet quite simply.

"Does she care about you?"

"I think so," was the equally grave reply.

"Then go over there and offer yourself," said the priest; "offer her everything you can; offer her heaven and earth if you've got them. The time is short."

"Why?" asked the astonished man of letters.

"Because," said Father Brown, "her Doom is coming up the road."

"Nothing is coming up the road," argued Muscari, "except the rescue."

"Well, you go over there," said his adviser, "and be ready to rescue her from the rescue."

Almost as he spoke the hedges were broken all along the ridge by a rush of the escaping brigands. They dived into bushes and thick grass like defeated men pursued; and the great cocked hats of the mounted gendarmerie were seen passing along above the broken hedge. Another order was given; there was a noise of dismounting, and a tall officer with a cocked hat, a grey imperial and a paper in his hand appeared in the gap that was the gate of the Paradise of Thieves. There was a momentary silence, broken in an extraordinary way by the banker, who cried out in a hoarse and strangled voice, "Robbed! I've been robbed!"

"Why, that was hours ago," cried his son in astonishment, "when you were robbed of two thousand pounds."

"Not of two thousand pounds," said the financier, with an abrupt and terrible composure, "only of a small bottle."

The policeman with the grey imperial was striding across the green hollow. Encountering the King of Thieves in his path, he clapped him on the shoulder with something between a caress and a buffet and gave him a push that sent him staggering away. "You'll get into trouble, too," he said, "if you play these tricks."

Again to Muscari's artistic eye it seemed scarcely like the capture of a great outlaw at bay. Passing on, the policeman halted before the Harrogate group and said: "Samuel Harrogate, I arrest you in the name of the law for embezzlement of the funds of the Hull and Huddersfield Bank."

The great banker nodded with an odd air of business assent, seemed to reflect a moment, and before they could interpose took a half turn and a step that brought him to the edge of the outer mountain wall. Then, flinging up his hands, he leapt, exactly as he leapt out of the coach. But this time he did not fall into a little meadow just beneath;

he fell a thousand feet below, to become a wreck of bones in the valley.

The anger of the Italian policeman, which he expressed volubly to Father Brown, was largely mixed with admiration. "It was like him to escape us at last," he said. "*He* was a great brigand if you like. This last trick of his I believe to be absolutely unprecedented. He fled with the company's money to Italy, and actually got himself captured by sham brigands in his own pay, so as to explain both the disappearance of the money and the disappearance of himself. That demand for ransom was really taken seriously by most of the police. But for years he's been doing things as good as that, quite as good as that. He will be a serious loss to his family."

Muscari was leading away the unhappy daughter, who held hard to him, as she did for many a year after. But even in that tragic wreck he could not help having a smile and a hand of half-mocking friendship for the indefensible Ezza Montano. "And where are you going next?" he asked him over his shoulder.

"Birmingham," answered the actor, puffing a cigarette. "Didn't I tell you I was a Futurist? I really do believe in those things if I believe in anything. Change, bustle and new things every morning. I am going to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, Huddersfield, Glasgow, Chicago—in short, to enlightened, energetic, civilised society!"

"In short," said Muscari, "to the real Paradise of Thieves."

AGATHA CHRISTIE

PHILOMEL COTTAGE

"Good bye, darling."

"Good bye, sweetheart."

Alix Martin stood leaning over the small rustic gate, watching the retreating figure of her husband, as he walked down the road in the direction of the village.

Presently he turned a bend and was lost to sight, but Alix still stayed in the same position, absent-mindedly smoothing a lock of the rich brown hair which had blown across her face, her eyes far away and dreamy.

Alix Martin was not beautiful, nor even, strictly speaking, pretty. But her face, the face of a woman no longer in her first youth, was irradiated and softened until her former colleagues of the old office days would hardly have recognised her. Miss Alix King had been a trim business-like young woman, efficient, slightly brusque in manner, obviously capable and matter-of-fact. She had made the least, not the most, of her beautiful brown hair. Her mouth, not ungenerous in its lines, had always been severely compressed. Her clothes had been neat and suitable without a hint of coquetry.

Alix had graduated in a hard school. For fifteen years, from the age of eighteen until she was thirty-three, she had kept herself (and for seven years of the time, an invalid mother) by her work as a shorthand typist. It was the struggle for existence which had hardened the soft lines of her girlish face.

True, there had been romance—of a kind. Dick Windyford, a fellow clerk. Very much of a woman at heart, Alix had always known without seeming to know that he cared. Outwardly they had been friends, nothing more.

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Out of his slender salary, Dick had been hard put to it to provide for the schooling of a younger brother. For the moment, he could not think of marriage. Nevertheless when Alix envisaged the future, it was with the half acknowledged certainty that she would one day be Dick's wife. They cared for one another, so she would have put it, but they were both sensible people. Plenty of time, no need to do anything rash. So the years had gone on.

And then suddenly deliverance from daily toil had come to the girl in the most unexpected manner. A distant cousin had died leaving her money to Alix. A few thousand pounds, enough to bring in a couple of hundred a year. To Alix, it was freedom, life, independence. Now she and Dick need wait no longer.

But Dick reacted unexpectedly. He had never directly spoken of his love to Alix, now he seemed less inclined to do so than ever. He avoided her, became morose and gloomy. Alix was quick to realise the truth. She had become a woman of means. Delicacy and pride stood in the way of Dick's asking her to be his wife.

She liked him none the worse for it and was indeed deliberating as to whether she herself might not take the first step when for the second time the unexpected descended upon her.

She met Gerald Martin at a friend's house. He fell violently in love with her and within a week they were engaged. Alix, who had always considered herself "not the falling-in-love kind," was swept clean off her feet.

Unwittingly she had found the way to arouse her former lover. Dick Windyford had come to her stammering with rage and anger.

"The man's a perfect stranger to you. You know nothing about him."

"I know that I love him."

"How can you know—in a week?"

"It doesn't take everyone eleven years to find out that they're in love with a girl," cried Alix angrily.

His face went white.

"I've cared for you ever since I met you. I thought that you cared also."

Alix was truthful.

"I thought so too," she admitted. "But that was because I didn't know what love was."

Then Dick had burst out again. Prayers, entreaties, even threats. Threats against the man who had supplanted him. It was amazing to Alix to see the volcano that existed beneath the reserved exterior of the man who had thought she knew so well. Also, it frightened her a little. . . . Dick, of course, couldn't possibly mean the things he was saying, the threats of vengeance against Gerald Martin. He was angry, that was all. . . .

Her thoughts had gone back to that interview now, on this sunny morning, as she leant on the gate of the cottage. She had been married a month, and she was idyllically happy. Yet, in the momentary absence of the husband who was everything to her, a tinge of anxiety invaded her perfect happiness, and the cause of that anxiety was Dick Windyford.

Three times since her marriage she had dreamed the same dream. The environment differed, but the main facts were always the same. She saw her husband lying dead and Dick Windyford standing over him, and she knew clearly and distinctly that his was the hand which had dealt the fatal blow.

But horrible though that was, there was something more horrible still—horrible that was, on awakening, for in the dream it seemed perfectly natural and inevitable. *She, Alix Martin, was glad that her husband was dead*—she stretched out grateful hands to the murderer, sometimes she thanked him. The dream always ended the same way, with herself clasped in Dick Windyford's arms.

She had said nothing of this dream to her husband, but secretly it had perturbed her more than she liked to admit. Was it a warning—a warning against Dick Windyford? Had he some secret power which he was trying to establish over her at a distance? She did not know much

about hypnotism, but surely she had always heard that persons could not be hypnotised against their will.

Alix was roused from her thoughts by the sharp ringing of the telephone bell from within the house. She entered the cottage, and picked up the receiver. Suddenly she swayed, and put out a hand to keep herself from falling.

"Who did you say was speaking?"

"Why, Alix, what's the matter with your voice? I wouldn't have known it. It's Dick."

"Oh!" said Alix— "Oh! Where—where are you?"

"At the Traveller's Arms—that's the right name, isn't it? Or don't you even know of the existence of your village pub? I'm on my holiday—doing a bit of fishing here. Any objection to my looking you two good people up this evening after dinner?"

"No," said Alix sharply. "You mustn't come."

There was a pause, and Dick's voice, with a subtle alteration in it spoke again.

"I beg your pardon," he said formally. "Of course I won't bother you——"

Alix broke in hastily. Of course he must think her behaviour too extraordinary. It was extraordinary. Her nerves must be all to pieces. It wasn't Dick's fault that she had these dreams.

"I only meant that we were—engaged to-night," she explained, trying to make her voice sound as natural as possible. "Won't you—won't you come to dinner to-morrow night?"

But Dick evidently noticed the lack of cordiality in her tone.

"Thanks very much," he said, in the same formal voice. "But I may be moving on any time. Depends upon whether a pal of mine turns up or not. Good bye, Alix." He paused, and then added hastily, in a different tone. "Best of luck to you, my dear."

Alix hung up the receiver with a feeling of relief.

"He mustn't come here," she repeated to herself. "He mustn't come here. Oh! what a fool I am! To imagine

myself into a state like this. All the same, I'm glad he's not coming."

She caught up a rustic rush hat from a table, and passed out into the garden again, pausing to look up at the name carved over the porch, Philomel Cottage.

"Isn't it a very fanciful name?" she had said to Gerald once before they were married. He had laughed.

"You little Cockney," he had said, affectionately. "I don't believe you have ever heard a nightingale. I'm glad you haven't. Nightingales should sing only for lovers. We'll hear them together on a summer's evening outside our own home."

And at the remembrance of how they had indeed heard them, Alix, standing in the doorway of her home, blushed happily.

It was Gerald who had found Philomel Cottage. He had come to Alix bursting with excitement. He had found the very spot for them—unique—a gem—the chance of a lifetime. And when Alix had seen it, she too was captivated. It was true that the situation was rather lonely—they were two miles from the nearest village—but the cottage itself was so exquisite with its old world appearance, and its solid comfort of bathrooms, hot-water system, electric light and telephone, that she fell a victim to its charm immediately. And then a hitch occurred. The owner, a rich man who had made it his whim, declined to rent it. He would only sell.

Gerald Martin, though possessed of a good income, was unable to touch his capital. He could raise at most a thousand pounds. The owner was asking three. But Alix, who had set her heart on the place, came to the rescue. Her own capital was easily realized, being in bearer bonds. She would contribute half of it to the purchase of the home. So Philomel Cottage became their very own, and never for a minute had Alix regretted the choice. It was true that servants did not appreciate the rural solitude—indeed at the moment they had none at all—but Alix, who had been starved of domestic life, thoroughly en-

joyed cooking dainty little meals and looking after the house.

The garden which was magnificently stocked with flowers was attended to by an old man from the village who came twice a week, and Gerald Martin, who was keen on gardening, spent most of his time there.

As she rounded the corner of the house, Alix was surprised to see the old gardener in question busy over the flower beds. She was surprised because his days for work were Mondays and Fridays, and to-day was Wednesday.

"Why, George, what are you doing here?" she asked, as she came towards him.

The old man straightened up with a chuckle, touching the brim of an aged cap.

"I thought as how you'd be surprised, M'am. But 'tis this way. There be a Fête over to Squire's on Friday, and I sez to myself, I sez, neith Mr. Martin nor yet his good lady won't take it amiss if I comes for once on a Tuesday instead of a Friday."

"That's quite all right," said Alix, "I hope you'll enjoy yourself at the Fête."

"I reckon to," said George simply. "It's a fine thing to be able to eat your fill and know all the time as it's not you as is paying for it. Squire allus has a proper sit-down tea for 'is tenants. Then I thought too, Ma'am, as I might as well see you before you goes away so as to learn your wishes for the borders. You'll have no idea when you'll be back, Ma'am, I suppose?"

"But I'm not going away."

George stared at her.

"Bain't you going to Lunnon to-morrow?"

"No. What put such an idea into your head?"

George jerked his head over his shoulder.

"Met Maister down to village yesterday. He told me you was both going away to Lunnon to-morrow, and it was uncertain when you'd be back again."

"Nonsense," said Alix, laughing. "You must have misunderstood him."

All the same, she wondered exactly what it could have

been that Gerald had said to lead the old man into such a curious mistake. Going to London? She never wanted to go to London again.

"I hate London," she said suddenly and harshly.

"Ah!" said George placidly. "I must have been mistook somehow, and yet he said it plain enough it seemed to me. I'm glad you're stopping on here—I don't hold with all this gallivanting about, and I don't think nothing of Lunnon. I've never needed to go there. Too many moty cars—that's the trouble nowadays. Once people have got a moty car, blessed if they can stay still anywheres. Mr. Ames, wot used to have this house—nice peaceful sort of gentleman he was until he bought one of them things. Hadn't 'ad it a month before he put up this cottage for sale. A tidy lot he'd spent on it, too, with taps in all the bedrooms, and the electric light and all. 'You'll never see your money back,' I sez to him. 'It's not everyone as'll have your fad for washing themselves in every room in the house, in a manner of speaking.' But 'George,' he sez to me, 'I'll get every penny of two thousand pounds for this house.' And sure enough, he did."

"He got three thousand," said Alix, smiling.

"Two thousand," repeated George. "The sum he was asking was talked of at the time. And a very high figure it was thought to be."

"It really was three thousand," said Alix.

"Women never understand figures," said George, unconvinced. "You'll not tell me that Mr. Ames had the face to stand up to you, and say three thousand brazen like in a loud voice."

"He didn't say it to me," said Alix. "He said it to my husband."

George stooped again to his flower bed.

"The price was two thousand," he said obstinately.

Alix did not trouble to argue with him. Moving to one of the further beds, she began to pick an armful of flowers. The sunshine, the scent of the flowers, the faint hum of hurrying bees, all conspired to make the day a perfect thing.

As she moved with her fragrant posy towards the house, Alix noticed a small dark green object, peeping from between some leaves in one of the beds. She stooped and picked it up, recognising it for her husband's pocket diary. It must have fallen from his pocket when he was weeding.

She opened it, scanning the entries with some amusement. Almost from the beginning of their married life, she had realised that the impulsive and emotional Gerald had the uncharacteristic virtues of neatness and method. He was extremely fussy about meals being punctual, and always planned his day ahead with the accuracy of a time table. This morning, for instance, he had announced that he should start for the village after breakfast—at 10:15. And at 10:15 to the minute he had left the house.

Looking through the diary, she was amused to notice the entry on the date of May 14th. "Marry Alix St. Peter's 2:30."

"The big silly," murmured Alix to herself, turning the pages.

Suddenly she stopped.

"Thursday, June 18th—why that's to-day."

In the space for that day was written in Gerald's neat precise hand: *"9 p.m."* Nothing else. What had Gerald planned to do at 9 p.m. Alix wondered. She smiled to herself as she realised that had this been a story, like those she had so often read, the diary would doubtless have furnished her with some sensational revelation. It would have had in it for certain the name of another woman. She fluttered the back pages idly. There were dates, appointments, cryptic references to business deals, but only one woman's name—her own.

Yet as she slipped the book into her pocket and went on with her flowers to the house, she was aware of a vague uneasiness. Those words of Dick Windyford's recurred to her, almost as though he had been at her elbow repeating them: "The man's a perfect stranger to you. You know nothing about him."

It was true. What did she know about him. After all,

Gerald was forty. In forty years there must have been women in his life. . . .

Alix shook herself impatiently. She must not give way to these thoughts. She had a far more instant preoccupation to deal with. Should she, or should she not, tell her husband that Dick Windyford had rung her up?

There was the possibility to be considered that Gerald might have already run across him in the village. But in that case he would be sure to mention it to her immediately upon his return and matters would be taken out of her hands. Otherwise—what? Alix was aware of a distinct desire to say nothing about it. Gerald had always shown himself kindly disposed towards the other. "Poor devil," he had said once, "I believe he's just as keen on you as I am. Hard luck on him to be shelved." He had had no doubts of Alix's own feelings.

If she told him, he was sure to suggest asking Dick Windyford to Philomel Cottage. Then she would have to explain that Dick had proposed it himself, and that she had made an excuse to prevent his coming. And when he asked her why she had done so, what could she say? Tell him her dream? But he would only laugh—or worse see that she attached an importance to it which he did not. Then he would think—oh! he might think anything!

In the end, rather shamefacedly, Alix decided to say nothing. It was the first secret she had ever kept from her husband, and the consciousness of it made her feel ill at ease.

When she heard Gerald returning from the village shortly before lunch, she hurried into the kitchen and pretended to be busy with the cooking so as to hide her confusion.

It was evident at once that Gerald had seen nothing of Dick Windyford. Alix felt at once relieved and embarrassed. She was definitely committed now to a policy of concealment. For the rest of the day she was nervous and absent-minded, starting at every sound, but her husband seemed to notice nothing. He himself seemed to have his thoughts far away, and once or twice she had to speak a

second time before he answered some trivial remark of hers.

It was not until after their simple evening meal, when they were sitting in the oak beamed living room with the windows thrown open to let in the sweet night air scented with the perfume of the mauve and white stocks that grew outside, that Alix remembered the pocket diary, and seized upon it gladly to distract her thoughts from their doubt and perplexity.

"Here's something you've been watering the flowers with," she said, and threw it into his lap.

"Dropped it in the border, did I?"

"Yes, I know all your secrets now."

"Not guilty," said Gerald, shaking his head.

"What about your assignation at nine o'clock to-night?"

"Oh! that—" he seemed taken aback for a moment, then he smiled as though something afforded him particular amusement. "It's an assignation with a particularly nice girl, Alix. She's got brown hair and blue eyes and she's particularly like you."

"I don't understand," said Alix, with mock severity. "You're evading the point."

"No, I'm not. As a matter of fact, that's a reminder that I'm going to develop some negatives to-night, and I want you to help me."

Gerald Martin was an enthusiastic photographer. He had a somewhat old fashioned camera, but with an excellent lens, and he developed his own plates in a small cellar which he had had fitted up as a dark room. He was never tired of posing Alix in different positions.

"And it must be done at nine o'clock precisely," said Alix teasingly.

Gerald looked a little vexed.

"My dear girl," he said with a shade of testiness in his manner. "One should always plan a thing for a definite time. Then one gets through one's work properly."

Alix sat for a minute or two in silence watching her husband as he lay in his chair smoking, his dark head flung back and the clear cut lines of his clean shaven face

showing up against the sombre background. And suddenly, from some unknown source, a wave of panic surged over her, so that she cried out before she could stop herself. "Oh! Gerald, I wish I knew more about you."

Her husband turned an astonished face upon her.

"But, my dear Alix, you do know all about me. I've told you of my boyhood in Northumberland, of my life in South Africa, and these last ten years in Canada which have brought me success."

"Oh! business!"

Gerald laughed suddenly.

"I know what you mean—love affairs. You women are all the same. Nothing interests you but the personal element."

Alix felt her throat go dry, as she muttered indistinctly: "Well, but there must have been—love affairs. I mean—If I only knew——"

There was silence again for a minute or two. Gerald Martin was frowning, a look of indecision on his face. When he spoke, it was gravely, without a trace of his former bantering manner.

"Do you think it wise, Alix—this—Bluebeard's chamber business? There have been women in my life, yes. I don't deny it. You wouldn't believe me if I did deny it. But I can swear to you truthfully that not one of them meant anything to me."

There was a ring of sincerity in his voice which comforted the listening wife.

"Satisfied, Alix?" he asked, with a smile. Then he looked at her with a shade of curiosity.

"What has turned your mind onto these unpleasant subjects to-night of all nights? You never mentioned them before."

Alix got up and began to walk about restlessly.

"Oh! I don't know," she said. "I've been nervy all day."

"That's odd," said Gerald, in a low voice, as though speaking to himself. "That's very odd."

"Why is it odd?"

"Oh! my dear girl, don't flash out at me so. I only said it was odd because as a rule you're so sweet and serene."

Alix forced a smile.

"Everything's conspired to annoy me to-day," she confessed. "Even old George had got some ridiculous idea into his head that we were going away to London. He said you had told him so."

"Where did you see him?" asked Gerald sharply.

"He came to work to-day instead of Friday."

"The old fool," said Gerald angrily.

Alix stared in surprise. Her husband's face was convulsed with rage. She had never seen him so angry. Seeing her astonishment, Gerald made an effort to regain control of himself.

"Well, he *is* a stupid old fool," he protested.

"What can you have said to make him think that?"

"I? I never said anything. At least—oh! yes, I remember, I made some weak joke about being 'off to London in the morning' and I suppose he took it seriously. Or else he didn't hear properly. You undeceived him, of course?"

He waited anxiously for her reply.

"Of course, but he's the sort of old man who if once he gets an idea in his head—well, it isn't so easy to get it out again."

Then she told him of the gardener's insistence on the sum asked for the cottage.

Gerald was silent for a minute or two, then he said slowly:

"Ames was willing to take two thousand in cash and the remaining thousand on mortgage. That's the origin of that mistake, I fancy."

"Very likely," agreed Alix.

Then she looked up at the clock, and pointed to it with a mischievous finger.

"We ought to be getting down to it, Gerald. Five minutes behind schedule."

A very peculiar smile came over Gerald Martin's face.

"I've changed my mind," he said quietly. "I shall not do any photography to-night."

A woman's mind is a curious thing. When she went to bed that Thursday night, Alix's mind was contented and at rest. Her momentarily assailed happiness reasserted itself, triumphant as of yore.

But by the evening of the following day, she realised that some subtle forces were at work undermining it. Dick Windyford had not rung up again, nevertheless she felt what she supposed to be his influence at work. Again and again those words of his recurred to her. "The man's a perfect stranger. You know nothing about him." And with them came the memory of her husband's face, photographed clearly on her brain as he said: "Do you think it wise, Alix, this—Bluebeard's chamber business?" Why had he said that? What had he meant by those words?

There had been warning in them—a hint of menace. It was as though he had said in effect—"You had better not pry into my life, Alix. You may get a nasty shock if you do." True, a few minutes later, he had sworn to her that there had been no woman in his life that mattered—but Alix tried in vain to recapture her sense of his sincerity. Was he not bound to swear that?

By Saturday morning, Alix had convinced herself that there had been a woman in Gerald's life—a Bluebeard's chamber that he had sedulously sought to conceal from her. Her jealousy, slow to awaken, was now rampant.

Was it a woman he had been going to meet that night, at 9 p.m.? Was his story of photographs to develop a lie invented upon the spur of the moment? With a queer sense of shock Alix realised that ever since she had found that pocket diary she had been in torment. And there had been nothing in it? That was the irony of the whole thing.

Three days ago she would have sworn that she knew her husband through and through. Now it seemed to her that he was a stranger of whom she knew nothing. She

remembered his unreasonable anger against old George, so at variance with his usual good tempered manner. A small thing, perhaps, but it showed her that she did not really know the man who was her husband.

There were several little things required on Saturday from the village to carry them over the week-end. In the afternoon Alix suggested that she should go for them whilst Gerald remained in the garden, but somewhat to her surprise he opposed this plan vehemently, and insisted on going himself whilst she remained at home. Alix was forced to give way to him, but his insistence surprised and alarmed her. Why was he so anxious to prevent her going to the village?

Suddenly an explanation suggested itself to her which made the whole thing clear. Was it not possible that, whilst saying nothing to her, Gerald had indeed come across Dick Windyford? Her own jealousy, entirely dormant at the time of their marriage, had only developed afterwards. Might it not be the same with Gerald? Might he not be anxious to prevent her seeing Dick Windyford again? This explanation was so consistent with the facts, and so comforting to Alix's perturbed mind, that she embraced it eagerly.

Yet when tea time had come and past, she was restless and ill at ease. She was struggling with a temptation that had assailed her ever since Gerald's departure. Finally, pacifying her conscience with the assurance that the room did need a thorough tidying, she went upstairs to her husband's dressing room. She took a duster with her to keep up the pretense of housewifery.

"If I were only sure," she repeated to herself. "If I could only be sure."

In vain she told herself that anything compromising would have been destroyed ages ago. Against that she argued that men do sometimes keep the most damning piece of evidence through an exaggerated sentimentality.

In the end Alix succumbed. Her cheeks burning with the shame of her action, she hunted breathlessly through packets of letters and documents, turned out the drawers,

even went through the pockets of her husband's clothes. Only two drawers eluded her, the lower drawer of the chest of drawers, and the small right hand drawer of the writing desk were both locked. But Alix was by now lost to all shame. In one of those drawers she was convinced that she would find evidence of this imaginary woman of the past who obsessed her.

She remembered that Gerald had left his keys lying carelessly on the sideboard down stairs. She fetched them and tried them one by one. The third key fitted the writing table drawer. Alix pulled it open eagerly. There was a cheque book, and a wallet well stuffed with notes, and at the back of the drawer a packet of letters tied up with a piece of tape.

Her breath coming unevenly, Alix untied the tape. Then a deep burning blush overspread her face, and she dropped the letters back into the drawer, closing and relocking it. For the letters were her own, written to Gerald Martin before she married him.

She turned now to the chest of drawers, more with a wish to feel that she had left nothing undone, than from any expectation of finding what she sought. She was shamed and almost convinced of the madness of her obsession.

To her annoyance none of the keys on Gerald's bunch fitted the drawer in question. Not to be defeated, Alix went into the other rooms and brought back a selection of keys with her. To her satisfaction, the key of the spare room wardrobe also fitted the chest of drawers. She unlocked the drawer and pulled it open. But there was nothing in it but a roll of newspaper clippings already dirty and discoloured with age.

Alix breathed a sigh of relief. Nevertheless she glanced at the clippings, curious to know what subject had interested Gerald so much that he had taken the trouble to keep the dusty roll. They were nearly all American papers, dated some seven years ago, and dealing with the trial of the notorious swindler and bigamist, Charles LeMaitre. LeMaitre had been suspected of doing away with his

women victims. A skeleton had been found beneath the floor of one of the houses he had rented, and most of the women he had "married" had never been heard of again.

He had defended himself from the charge with consummate skill, aided by some of the best legal talent in the United States. The Scottish verdict of "Non proven" might perhaps have stated the case best. In its absence, he was found Not Guilty on the capital charge, though sentenced to a long term of imprisonment on the other charges preferred against him.

Alix remembered the excitement caused by the case at the time, and also the sensation aroused by the escape of LeMaitre some three years later. He had never been recaptured. The personality of the man and his extraordinary power over women had been discussed at great length in the English papers at the time, together with an account of his excitability in court, his passionate protestations, and his occasional sudden physical collapses, due to the fact that he had a weak heart, though the ignorant accredited it to his dramatic powers.

There was a picture of him in one of the clippings Alix held, and she studied it with some interest—a long bearded scholarly looking gentleman. It reminded him of someone, but for the moment she could not tell who that someone was. She had never known that Gerald took an interest in crime and famous trials, though she knew that it was a hobby with many men.

Who was it the face reminded her of? Suddenly, with a shock, she realised that it was Gerald himself. The eye and brow bore a strong resemblance to him. Perhaps he had kept the cutting for that reason. Her eyes went on to the paragraph beside the picture. Certain dates, it seemed had been entered in the accused's pocket book, and it was contended that these were dates when he had done away with his victims. Then a woman gave evidence and identified the prisoner positively by the fact that he had a mole on his left wrist, just below the palm of the left hand.

Alix dropped the papers from a nerveless hand, and

swayed as she stood. *On his left wrist, just below the palm, Gerald had a small scar. . . .*

The room whirled round her. . . . Afterwards it struck her as strange that she should have leaped at once to such absolute certainty. Gerald Martin was Charles LeMaitre! She knew it and accepted it in a flash. Disjointed fragments whirled through her brain, like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle fitting into place.

The money paid for the house—her money—her money only. The Bearer bonds she had entrusted to his keeping. Even her dream appeared in its true significance. Deep down in her, her subconscious self had always feared Gerald Martin and wished to escape from him. And it was to Dick Windyford this self of hers had looked for help. That, too, was why she was able to accept the truth so easily, without doubt or hesitation. She was to have been another of LeMaitre's victims. Very soon, perhaps.

A half cry escaped her as she remembered something. Thursday 9 p.m. The cellar, with the flagstones that were so easily raised. Once before, he had buried one of his victims in a cellar. It had been all planned for Thursday night. But to write it down beforehand in that methodical manner—insanity! No, it was logical. Gerald always made a memorandum of his engagements—murder was, to him, a business proposition like any other.

But what had saved her? What could possibly have saved her? Had he relented at the last minute? No—in a flash the answer came to her. Old George. She understood now her husband's uncontrollable anger. Doubtless he had paved the way by telling everyone he met that they were going to London the next day. Then George had come to work unexpectedly, had mentioned London to her, and she had contradicted the story. Too risky to do away with her that night, with old George repeating that conversation. But what an escape! If she had not happened to mention that trivial matter—Alix shuddered.

But there was no time to be lost. She must get away at once—before he came back. For nothing on earth would she spend another night under the same roof with him.

She hurriedly replaced the roll of clippings in the drawer, shut it to and locked it.

And then she stayed motionless as though frozen to stone. She had heard the creak of the gate into the road. Her husband had returned.

For a moment Alix stayed as though petrified, then she crept on tip-toe to the window, looking out from behind the shelter of the curtain.

Yes, it was her husband. He was smiling to himself and humming a little tune. In his hand he held an object which almost made the terrified girl's heart stop beating. It was a brand new spade.

Alix leaped to a knowledge born of instinct. *It was to be to-night.* . . .

But there was still a chance. Gerald, still humming his little tune, went round to the back of the house.

"He's going to put it in the cellar—ready," thought Alix with a shiver.

Without hesitating a moment, she ran down the stairs and out of the cottage. But just as she emerged from the door, her husband came round the other side of the house.

"Hullo," he said. "Where are you running off to in such a hurry?"

Alix strove desperately to appear calm and as usual. Her chance was gone for the moment, but if she was careful not to arouse his suspicions, it would come again later. Even now, perhaps. . . .

"I was going to walk to the end of the lane and back," she said, in a voice that sounded weak and uncertain to her own ears.

"Right," said Gerald, "I'll come with you."

"No—please, Gerald. I'm—nervy, headachy—I'd rather go alone."

He looked at her attentively. She fancied a momentary suspicion gleamed in his eye.

"What's the matter with you, Alix? You're pale—trembling."

"Nothing," she forced herself to be brusque—smiling. "I've got a headache, that's all. A walk will do me good."

"Well, it's no good you're saying you don't want me," declared Gerald with his easy laugh. "I'm coming whether you want me or not."

She dared not protest further. If he suspected that she *knew*——

With an effort she managed to regain something of her normal manner. Yet she had an uneasy feeling that he looked at her sideways every now and then, as though not quite satisfied. She felt that his suspicions were not completely allayed.

When they returned to the house, he insisted on her lying down, and brought some eau de cologne to bathe her temples. He was, as ever, the devoted husband, yet Alix felt herself as helpless as though bound hand and foot in a trap.

Not for a minute would he leave her alone. He went with her into the kitchen and helped her to bring in the simple cold dishes she had already prepared. Supper was a meal that choked her, yet she forced herself to eat, and even to appear gay and natural. She knew now that she was fighting for her life. She was alone with this man, miles from help, absolutely at his mercy. Her only chance was so to lull his suspicions that he would leave her alone for a few moments—long enough for her to get to the telephone in the hall and summon assistance. That was her only hope now. He would overtake her if she took to flight long before she could reach assistance.

A momentary hope flashed over her as she remembered how he had abandoned his plan before. Suppose she told him that Dick Windyford was coming up to see them that evening?

The words trembled on her lips—then she rejected them hastily. This man would not be baulked a second time. There was a determination, an elation underneath his calm bearing that sickened her. She would only precipitate the crime. He would murder her there and then, and calmly ring up Dick Windyford with a tale of having been suddenly called away. Oh! if only Dick Windyford were coming to the house this evening. If Dick——

A sudden idea flashed into her mind. She looked sharply sideways at her husband as though she feared that he might read her mind. With the forming of a plan, her courage was reinforced. She became so completely natural in manner that she marvelled at herself. She felt that Gerald now was completely reassured.

She made the coffee and took it out to the porch where they often sat on fine evenings.

"By the way," said Gerald suddenly. "We'll do those photographs later."

Alix felt a shiver run through her, but she replied nonchalantly:

"Can't you manage alone? I'm rather tired to-night."

"It won't take long." He smiled to himself, "And I can promise you you won't be tired afterwards."

The words seemed to amuse him. Alix shuddered. Now or never was the time to carry out her plan.

She rose to her feet.

"I'm just going to telephone to the butcher," she announced nonchalantly. "Don't you bother to move."

"To the butcher? At this time of night?"

"His shop's shut, of course, silly. But he's in his house all right. And to-morrow's Saturday, and I want him to bring me some veal cutlets early, before someone else grabs them from him. The old dear will do anything for me."

She passed quickly into the house, closing the door behind her. She heard Gerald say, "Don't shut the door," and was quick with her light reply. "It keeps the moths out. I hate moths. Are you afraid I'm going to make love to the butcher, silly?"

Once inside she snatched down the telephone receiver and gave the number of the Traveller's Arms. She was put through at once.

"Mr. Windyford? Is he still there? May I speak to him?"

Then her heart gave a sickening thump. The door was pushed open and her husband came into the hall.

"Do go away, Gerald," she said pettishly. "I hate any one listening when I'm telephoning."

He merely laughed and threw himself into a chair.

"Sure it really is the butcher you're telephoning to?" he quizzed.

Alix was in despair. Her plan had failed. In a minute Dick Windyford would come to the phone. Should she risk all and cry out an appeal for help. Would he grasp what she meant before Gerald wrenched her away from the phone. Or would he merely treat it as a practical joke.

And then as she nervously depressed and released the little key in the receiver she was holding, which permits the voice to be heard or not heard at the other end, another plan flashed into her head.

"It will be difficult," she thought. "It means keeping my head, and thinking of the right words, and not faltering for a moment, but I believe I could do it. I *must* do it."

And at that minute she heard Dick Windyford's voice at the other end of the phone.

Alix drew a deep breath. Then she depressed the key firmly and spoke.

"Mrs. Martin speaking—from Philomel Cottage. *Please come* (she released the key) to-morrow morning with six nice veal cutlets (she depressed the key again) *It's very important* (she released the key) Thank you so much, Mr. Hexworthy, you don't mind my ringing you up so late, I hope, but those veal cutlets are really a matter of (she depressed the key again) *life or death* . . . (she released it) Very well—to-morrow morning—(she depressed it) *as soon as possible* . . ."

She replaced the receiver on the hook and turned to face her husband, breathing hard.

"So that's how you talk to your butcher, is it?" said Gerald.

"It's the feminine touch," said Alix lightly.

She was simmering with excitement. He had suspected nothing. Surely Dick, even if he didn't understand, would come.

She passed into the sitting room and switched on the electric light. Gerald followed her.

"You seem very full of spirits now?" he said, watching her curiously.

"Yes," said Alix. "My headache's gone."

She sat down in her usual seat and smiled at her husband, as he sank into his own chair opposite her. She was saved. It was only five and twenty past eight. Long before nine o'clock Dick would have arrived.

"I didn't think much of that coffee you gave me," complained Gerald. "It tasted very bitter."

"It's a new kind I was trying. We won't have it again if you don't like it, dear."

Alix took up a piece of needlework and began to stitch. She felt complete confidence in her own ability to keep up the part of the devoted wife. Gerald read a few pages of his book. Then he glanced up at the clock and tossed the book away.

"Half-past eight. Time to go down to the cellar and start work."

The work slipped from Alix's fingers.

"Oh! not yet. Let us wait until nine o'clock."

"No, my girl, half-past eight. That's the time I fixed. You'll be able to get to bed all the earlier."

"But I'd rather wait until nine."

"Half-past eight," said Gerald obstinately. "You know when I fix a time, I always stick to it. Come along, Alix. I'm not going to wait a minute longer."

Alix looked up at him, and in spite of herself she felt a wave of terror slide over her. The mask had been lifted; Gerald's hands were twitching; his eyes were shining with excitement; he was continually passing his tongue over his dry lips. He no longer cared to conceal his excitement.

Alix thought: "It's true—*he can't wait*—he's like a madman."

He strode over to her, and jerked her onto her feet with a hand on her shoulder.

"Come on, my girl—or I'll carry you there."

His tone was gay, but there was an undisguised ferocity

behind it that appalled her. With a supreme effort she jerked herself free and clung cowering against the wall. She was powerless. She couldn't get away—she couldn't do anything—and he was coming towards her.

"Now, Alix——"

"No—no."

She screamed, her hands held out impotently to ward him off.

"Gerald—stop—I've got something to tell you, something to confess . . ."

He did stop.

"To confess?" he said curiously.

"Yes, to confess." She went on desperately, seeking to hold his arrested attention. "Something I ought to have told you before."

A look of contempt swept over his face. The spell was broken.

"A former lover, I suppose," he sneered.

"No," said Alix. "Something else. You'd call it, I expect —yes, you'd call it a crime."

And at once she saw that she had struck the right note. Again his attention was arrested, held. Seeing that, her nerve came back to her. She felt mistress of the situation once more.

"You had better sit down again," she said quietly.

She herself crossed the room to her old chair and sat down. She even stooped and picked up her needlework. But behind her calmness she was thinking and inventing feverishly. For the story she invented must hold his interest until help arrived.

"I told you," she said, "that I had been a shorthand typist for fifteen years. That was not entirely true. There were two intervals. The first occurred when I was twenty-two. I came across a man, an elderly man with a little property. He fell in love with me and asked me to marry him. I accepted. We were married." She paused. "I induced him to insure his life in my favor."

She saw a sudden keen interest spring up in her husband's face, and went on with renewed assurance.

"During the war I worked for a time in a Hospital Dispensary. There I had the handling of all kinds of rare drugs and poisons. Yes, poisons."

She paused reflectively. He was keenly interested now, not a doubt of it. The murderer is bound to have an interest in murder. She had gambled on that, and succeeded. She stole a glance at the clock. It was five and twenty to nine.

"There is one poison—it is a little white powder. A pinch of it means death. You know something about poisons perhaps?"

She put the question in some trepidation. If he did, she would have to be careful.

"No," said Gerald. "I know very little about them."

She drew a breath of relief. This made her task easier.

"You have heard of hyoscine, of course? This is a drug that acts much the same way, but it is absolutely untraceable. Any doctor would give a certificate of heart failure. I stole a small quantity of this drug and kept it by me."

She paused, marshalling her forces.

"Go on," said Gerald.

"No. I'm afraid. I can't tell you. Another time."

"Now," he said impatiently. "I want to hear."

"We had been married a month. I was very good to my elderly husband, very kind and devoted. He spoke in praise of me to all the neighbors. Everyone knew what a devoted wife I was. I always made his coffee myself every evening. One evening, when we were alone together, I put a pinch of the deadly alkaloid in his cup."

Alix paused, and carefully rethreaded her needle. She, who had never acted in her life, rivalled the greatest actress in the world at this moment. She was actually living the part of the cold-blooded poisoner.

"It was very peaceful. I sat watching him. Once he gasped a little and asked for air. I opened the window. Then he said he could not move from his chair. Presently he died."

She stopped, smiling. It was a quarter to nine. Surely they would come soon.

"How much," said Gerald, "was the insurance money?"

"About two thousand pounds. I speculated with it, and lost it. I went back to my office work. But I never meant to remain there long. Then I met another man. I had stuck to my maiden name at the office. He didn't know I had been married before. He was a younger man, rather good looking, and quite well off. We were married quietly in Sussex. He didn't want to insure his life, but of course he made a will in my favour. He liked me to make his coffee myself also, just as my first husband had done."

Alix smiled reflectively, and added simply:

"I make very good coffee."

Then she went on.

"I had several friends in the village where we were living. They were very sorry for me, with my husband dying suddenly of heart failure one evening after dinner. I didn't quite like the doctor. I don't think he suspected me, but he was certainly very surprised at my husband's sudden death. I don't quite know why I drifted back to the office again. Habit, I suppose. My second husband left about four thousand pounds. I didn't speculate with it this time. I invested it. Then, you see——"

But she was interrupted. Gerald Martin, his face suffused with blood, half choking, was pointing a shaking forefinger at her.

"The coffee—My God! the coffee!"

She stared at him.

"I understand now why it was bitter. You devil. You've poisoned me."

His hands gripped the arms of his chair. He was ready to spring upon her.

"You've poisoned me."

Alix had retreated from him to the fireplace. Now, terrified, she opened her lips to deny—and then paused. In another minute he would spring upon her. She summoned all her strength. Her eyes held his steadily, compellingly.

"Yes," she said. "I poisoned you. Already the poison is working. At this minute you can't move from your chair—you can't move——"

If she could keep him there—even a few minutes——

Ah! what was that? Footsteps on the road. The creak of the gate. Then footsteps on the path outside. The door of the hall opened——

"You can't move," she said again.

Then she slipped past him and fled headlong from the room to fall half fainting into Dick Windyford's arms.

"My God! Alix!" he cried.

Then he turned to the man with him, a tall stalwart figure in policeman's uniform.

"Go and see what's been happening in that room."

He laid Alix carefully down on a couch and bent over her.

"My little girl," he murmured. "My poor little girl. What have they been doing to you?"

Her eyelids fluttered and her lips just murmured his name.

Dick was aroused from tumultuous thoughts by the policeman's touching him on the arm.

"There's nothing in that room, sir, but a man sitting in a chair. Looks as though he'd had some kind of bad fright, and——"

"Yes?"

"Well, sir, he's—dead."

They were startled by hearing Alix's voice. She spoke as though in some kind of dream.

"And presently," she said, almost as though she were quoting from something, "he died. . . ."

AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE ADVENTURE OF JOHNNIE WAVERLY

"You can understand the feelings of a mother," said Mrs. Waverly for perhaps the sixth time.

She looked appealingly at Poirot. My little friend, always sympathetic to motherhood in distress, gesticulated reassuringly.

"But yes, but yes, I comprehend perfectly. Have faith in Papa Poirot."

"The police—" began Mr. Waverly.

His wife waved the interruption aside.

"I won't have anything more to do with the police. We trusted to them and look what happened! But I'd heard so much of M. Poirot and the wonderful things he'd done, that I felt he might possibly be able to help us. A mother's feelings—"

Poirot hastily stemmed the reiteration with an eloquent gesture. Mrs. Waverly's emotion was obviously genuine, but it assorted strangely with her shrewd, rather hard type of countenance. When I heard later that she was the daughter of a prominent steel manufacturer of Birmingham who had worked his way up in the world from an office boy to his present eminence, I realised that she had inherited many of the paternal qualities.

Mr. Waverly was a big florid jovial looking man. He stood with his legs straddled wide apart and looked the type of the country squire.

"I suppose you know all about this business, M. Poirot?"

The question was almost superfluous. For some days past the paper had been full of the sensational kidnapping of little Johnnie Waverly, the three-year-old son and heir

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of Marcus Waverly, Esq., of Waverly Court, Surrey, one of the oldest families in England.

"The main facts I know, of course, but recount to me the whole story, Monsieur, I beg of you. And in detail if you please."

"Well, I suppose the beginning of the whole thing was about ten days ago when I got an anonymous letter—beastly things, anyway—that I couldn't make head or tail of. The writer had the impudence to demand that I should pay him twenty-five thousand pounds—twenty-five thousand pounds, M. Poirot!—Failing my agreement, he threatened to kidnap Johnnie. Of course I threw the thing into the waste paper basket without more ado. Thought it was some silly joke. Five days later I got another letter. 'Unless you pay, your son will be kidnapped on the twenty-ninth.' That was on the twenty-seventh. Ada was worried, but I couldn't bring myself to treat the matter seriously. Damn it all, we're in England. Nobody goes about kidnapping children and holding them up to ransom."

"It is not a common practice, certainly," said Poirot. "Proceed, Monsieur."

"Well, Ada gave me no peace, so—feeling a bit of a fool—I laid the matter before Scotland Yard. They didn't seem to take the thing very seriously—inclined to my view that it was some silly joke. On the 28th I got a third letter. 'You have not paid. Your son will be taken from you at Twelve o'clock noon to-morrow, the twenty-ninth. It will cost you fifty thousand pounds to recover him.' Up I drove to Scotland Yard again. This time they were more impressed. They inclined to the view that the letters were written by a lunatic, and that in all probability an attempt of some kind would be made at the hour stated. They assured me that they would take all due precautions. Inspector McNeil and a sufficient force would come down to Waverly on the morrow and take charge.

"I went home much relieved in my mind. Yet we already had the feeling of being in a state of siege. I gave orders that no stranger was to be admitted, and that no

one was to leave the house. The evening passed off without any untoward incident, but on the following morning my wife was seriously unwell. Alarmed by her condition, I sent for Doctor Dakers. Her symptoms appeared to puzzle him. Whilst hesitating to suggest that she had been poisoned, I could see that that was what was in his mind. There was no danger, he assured me, but it would be a day or two before she would be able to get about again. Returning to my own room, I was startled and amazed to find a note pinned to my pillow. It was in the same handwriting as the others and contained just three words: 'At twelve o'clock.'

"I admit, M. Poirot, that then I saw red! Someone in the house was in this—one of the servants. I had them all up, blackguarded them right and left. They never split on each other; it was Miss Collins, my wife's companion, who informed me that she had seen Johnnie's nurse slip down the drive early that morning. I taxed her with it, and she broke down. She had left the child with the nursery maid and stolen out to meet a friend of hers—a man! Pretty goings on! She denied having pinned the note to my pillow—she may have been speaking the truth, I don't know. I felt I couldn't take the risk of the child's own nurse being in the plot. One of the servants was implicated—of that I was sure. Finally I lost my temper and sacked the whole bunch, nurse and all. I gave them an hour to pack their boxes and get out of the house."

Mr. Waverly's red face was quite two shades redder as he remembered his just wrath.

"Was not that a little injudicious, Monsieur?" suggested Poirot. "For all you know, you might have been playing into the enemy's hands."

Mr. Waverly stared at him.

"I don't see that. Send the whole lot packing, that was my idea. I wired to London for a fresh lot to be sent down that evening. In the meantime, there'd be only people I could trust in the house, my wife's secretary, Miss Collins, and Tredwell, the butler, who has been with me since I was a boy."

"And this Miss Collins, how long has she been with you?"

"Just a year," said Mrs. Waverly. "She has been invaluable to me as a secretary companion, and is also a very efficient housekeeper."

"The nurse?"

"She has been with me six months. She came to me with excellent references. All the same I never really liked her, although Johnnie was quite devoted to her."

"Still, I gather she had already left when the catastrophe occurred. Perhaps, Monsieur Waverly, you will be so kind as to continue."

Mr. Waverly resumed his narrative.

"Inspector McNeil arrived about 10:30. The servants had all left by then. He declared himself quite satisfied with the internal arrangement. He had various men posted in the Park outside, guarding all the approaches to the house, and he assured me that if the whole thing were not a hoax, we should undoubtedly catch my mysterious correspondent.

"I had Johnnie with me, and he and I and the Inspector went together into a room we call the Council Chamber. The Inspector locked the door. There is a big grandfather clock there, and as the hands drew near to twelve I don't mind confessing that I was as nervous as a cat. There was a whirring sound, and the clock began to strike. I clutched Johnnie. I had a feeling a man might drop from the skies. The last stroke sounded, and as it did so, there was a great commotion outside—shouting and running. The Inspector flung up the window and a constable came running up.

"'We've got him, sir,' he panted. 'He was sneaking up through the bushes. He's got a whole dope outfit on him.'

"We hurried out on the terrace where two constables were holding a ruffianly looking fellow in shabby clothes, who was twisting and turning in a vain endeavour to escape. One of the policemen held out an unrolled parcel which they had wrested from their captive. It contained

a pad of cotton wool and a bottle of chloroform. It made my blood boil to see it. There was a note, too, addressed to me. I tore it open. It bore the following words: 'You should have paid up. To ransom your son will now cost you fifty thousand. In spite of all your precautions he has been abducted at twelve o'clock on the 29th as I said.'

"I gave a great laugh, the laugh of relief, but as I did so I heard the hum of a motor and a shout. I turned my head. Racing down the drive towards the South Lodge at a furious speed was a low, long grey car. It was the man who drove it who had shouted, but that was not what gave me a shock of horror. It was the sight of Johnnie's flaxen curls. The child was in the car beside him.

"The Inspector ripped out an oath.

"'The child was here not a minute ago,' he cried. His eyes swept over us. We were all there, myself, Tredwell, Miss Collins. 'When did you see him last, Mr. Waverly?'

"I cast my mind back, trying to remember. When the constable had called us, I had run out with the Inspector, forgetting all about Johnnie.

"And then there came a sound that startled us, the chiming of a church clock from the village. With an exclamation the Inspector pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock. With one common accord we ran to the Council Chamber, the clock there marked the hour as ten minutes past. Someone must have deliberately tampered with it, for I have never known it gain or lose before. It is a perfect timekeeper."

Mr. Waverly paused. Poirot smiled to himself and straightened a little mat which the anxious father had pushed askew.

"A pleasing little problem, obscure and charming," murmured Poirot. "I will investigate it for you with pleasure. Truly it was planned *à merveille*."

Mrs. Waverly looked at him reproachfully.

"But my boy," she wailed.

Poirot hastily composed his face and looked the picture of earnest sympathy again.

"He is safe, Madame, he is unharmed. Rest assured, these miscreants will take the greatest care of him. Is he not to them the turkey—no, the goose—that lays the golden eggs?"

"M. Poirot, I'm sure there's only one thing to be done—pay up. I was all against it at first—but now! A mother's feelings—"

"But we have interrupted Monsieur in his history," cried Poirot hastily.

"I expect you know the rest pretty well from the papers," said Mr. Waverly. "Of course, Inspector McNeil got on to the telephone immediately. A description of the car and the man was circulated all round, and it looked at first as though everything was going to turn out all right. A car, answering to the description, with a man and a small boy, had passed through various villages, apparently making for London. At one place they had stopped, and it was noticed that the child was crying and obviously afraid of his companion. When Inspector McNeil announced that the car had been stopped and the man and boy detained, I was almost ill with relief. You know the sequel. The boy was not Johnnie, and the man was an ardent motorist, fond of children, who had picked up a small child playing in the streets of Edenswell, a village about fifteen miles from us, and was kindly giving him a ride. Thanks to the cocksure blundering of the police, all traces have disappeared. Had they not persistently followed the wrong car, they might by now have found the boy."

"Calm yourself, Monsieur. The police are a brave and intelligent force of men. Their mistake was a very natural one. And altogether it was a clever scheme. As to the man they caught in the grounds, I understand that his defence has consisted all along of a persistent denial. He declares that the note and parcel were given to him to deliver at Waverly Court. The man who gave them to him handed him a ten shilling note and promised him an-

other if it were delivered at exactly ten minutes to twelve. He was to approach the house through the grounds and knock at the side door."

"I don't believe a word of it," declared Mrs. Waverly hotly. "It's all a parcel of lies."

"*En verité,* it is a thin story," said Poirot reflectively. "But so far they have not shaken it. I understand also that he made a certain accusation?"

His glance interrogated Mr. Waverly. The latter got rather red again.

"The fellow had the impertinence to pretend that he recognized in Tredwell the man who gave him the parcel. 'Only the bloke has shaved off his moustache.' Tredwell, who was born on the estate!"

Poirot smiled a little at the country gentleman's indignation.

"Yet you yourself suspect an inmate of the house to have been accessory to the abduction."

"Yes, but not Tredwell."

"And you, Madame?" asked Poirot, suddenly turning to her.

"It could not have been Tredwell who gave this tramp the letter and parcel—if anybody ever did, which I don't believe—It was given him at ten o'clock, he says. At ten o'clock, Tredwell was with my husband in the smoking room."

"Were you able to see the face of the man in the car, Monsieur? Did it resemble that of Tredwell in any way?"

"It was too far away for me to see his face."

"Has Tredwell a brother, do you know?"

"He had several, but they are all dead. The last one was killed in the war."

"I am not yet clear as to the grounds of Waverly Court. The car was heading for the South Lodge. Is there another entrance?"

"Yes, what we call the East Lodge. It car be seen from the other side of the house."

"It seems to me strange that nobody saw the car entering the grounds."

"There is a right of way through, and access to a small chapel. A good many cars pass through. The man must have stopped the car in a convenient place, and run up to the house just as the alarm was given and attention attracted elsewhere."

"Unless he was already inside the house," mused Poirot. "Is there any place where he could have hidden?"

"Well, we certainly didn't make a thorough search of the house beforehand. There seemed no need. I suppose he might have hidden himself somewhere, but who would have let him in?"

"We shall come to that later. One thing at a time—let us be methodical. There is no special hiding place in the house? Waverly Court is an old place, and there are sometimes 'Priests' Holes' as they call them."

"By Gad, there *is* a Priest's Hole. It opens from one of the panels in the hall."

"Near the Council Chamber?"

"Just outside the door."

"Voila!"

"But nobody knows of its existence except my wife and myself."

"Tredwell?"

"Well—he might have heard of it."

"Miss Collins?"

"I have never mentioned it to her."

Poirot reflected for a minute.

"Well, Monsieur, the next thing is for me to come down to Waverly Court. If I arrive this afternoon, will it suit you?"

"Oh! as soon as possible, please, Monsieur Poirot," cried Mrs. Waverly. "Read this once more."

She thrust into his hands the last missive from the enemy which had reached the Waverlys that morning and which had sent her post haste to Poirot. It gave clever and explicit directions for the paying over of the money, and ended with a threat that the boy's life would pay for any treachery. It was clear that a love of money warred

with the essential mother love of Mrs. Waverly, and that the latter was at last gaining the day.

Poirot detained Mrs. Waverly for a minute behind her husband.

"Madame, the truth, if you please. Do you share your husband's faith in the butler, Tredwell?"

"I have nothing against him, Monsieur Poirot, I cannot see how he can have been concerned in this, but—well, I have never liked him—never!"

"One other thing, Madame, can you give me the address of the child's nurse?"

"149 Netherall Road, Hammersmith. You don't imagine—"

"Never do I imagine. Only—I employ the little grey cells. And sometimes, just sometimes, I have a little idea."

Poirot came back to me as the door closed.

"So Madame has never liked the butler. It is interesting, that, eh, Hastings?"

I refused to be drawn. Poirot has deceived me so often that I now go warily. There is always a catch somewhere.

After completing an elaborate outdoor toilet, we set off for Netherall Road. We were fortunate enough to find Miss Jessie Withers at home. She was a pleasant faced woman of thirty-five, capable and superior. I could not believe that she could be mixed up in the affair. She was bitterly resentful of the way she had been dismissed, but admitted that she had been in the wrong. She was engaged to be married to a painter and decorator who happened to be in the neighbourhood, and she had run out to meet him. The thing seemed natural enough. I could not quite understand Poirot. All his questions seemed to me quite irrelevant. They were concerned mainly with the daily routine of her life at Waverly Court. I was frankly bored, and glad when Poirot took his departure.

"Kidnapping is an easy job, *mon ami*," he observed, as he hailed a taxi in the Hammersmith Road and ordered it to drive to Waterloo. "That child could have been

abducted with the greatest ease any day for the last three years."

"I don't see that that advances us much," I remarked coldly.

"*Au contraire,* it advances us enormously, but enormously! If you must wear a tie pin, Hastings, at least let it be in the exact centre of your tie. At present it is at least a sixteenth of an inch too much to the right."

Waverly Court was a fine old place and had recently been restored with taste and care. Mr. Waverly showed us the Council Chamber, the terrace and all the various spots connected with the case. Finally, at Poirot's request, he pressed a spring in the wall, a panel slid aside, and a short passage led us into the "Priests' Hole."

"You see," said Waverly. "There is nothing here."

The tiny room was bare enough, there was not even the mark of a footstep on the floor. I joined Poirot where he was bending attentively over a mark in the corner.

"What do you make of this, my friend?"

There were four imprints close together.

"A dog," I cried.

"A very small dog, Hastings."

"A pom."

"Smaller than a pom."

"A gryphon?" I suggested doubtfully.

"Smaller even than a gryphon. A species unknown to the Kennel Club."

I looked at him. His face was alight with excitement and satisfaction.

"I was right," he murmured. "I knew I was right. Come, Hastings."

As we stepped out into the hall and the panel closed behind us, a young lady came out of a door farther down the passage. Mr. Waverly presented her to us.

"Miss Collins."

Miss Collins was about thirty years of age, brisk and alert in manner. She had fair, rather dull hair, and wore pince-nez.

At Poirot's request, we passed into a small morning

room, and he questioned her closely as to the servants and particularly as to Tredwell. She admitted that she did not like the butler.

"He gives himself airs," she explained.

They then went into the question of the food eaten by Mrs. Waverly on the night of the 28th. Miss Collins declared that she had partaken of the same dishes upstairs in her sitting room and had felt no ill effects. As she was departing I nudged Poirot.

"The dog," I whispered.

"Ah! yes, the dog!" He smiled broadly. "Is there a dog kept here by any chance, Mademoiselle?"

"There are two retrievers in the kennels outside."

"No, I mean a small dog, a toy dog."

"No—nothing of the kind."

Poirot permitted her to depart. Then, pressing the bell, he remarked to me:

"She lies, that Mademoiselle Collins. Possibly I should also in her place. Now for the butler."

Tredwell was a dignified individual. He told his story with perfect aplomb, and it was essentially the same as that of Mr. Waverly. He admitted that he knew the secret of the Priest's Hole.

When he finally withdrew, pontifical to the last, I met Poirot's quizzical eyes.

"What do you make of it all, Hastings?"

"What do you?" I parried.

"How cautious you become. Never, never will the grey cells function unless you stimulate them. Ah! but I will not tease you! Let us make our deductions together. What points strike us specially as being difficult?"

"There is one thing that strikes me," I said. "Why did the man who kidnapped the child go out by the South Lodge instead of by the East Lodge where no one would see him?"

"That is a very good point, Hastings, an excellent one. I will match it with another. Why warn the Waverlys beforehand? Why not simply kidnap the child and hold him to ransom?"

"Because they hoped to get the money without being forced to action."

"Surely it was very unlikely that the money would be paid on a mere threat?"

"Also they wanted to focus attention on 12 o'clock, so that when the tramp man was seized, the other could emerge from his hiding place and get away with the child unnoticed."

"That does not alter the fact that they were making a thing difficult that was perfectly easy. If they do not specify a time or date, nothing would be easier than to wait their chance, and carry off the child in a motor one day when he is out with his nurse."

"Ye—es," I admitted doubtfully.

"In fact, there is a deliberate playing of the farce! Now let us approach the question from another side. Everything goes to show that there was an accomplice inside the house. Point No. 1, the mysterious poisoning of Mrs. Waverly. Point No. 2, the letter pinned to the pillow. Point No. 3, the putting on of the clock ten minutes—all inside jobs. And an additional fact that you may not have noticed. There was no dust in the Priest's Hole. It had been swept out with a broom.

"Now then, we have four people in the house. (We can exclude the nurse, since she could not have swept out the Priest's Hole, though she could have attended to the other three points. Four people. Mr. and Mrs. Waverly, Tredwell, the butler, and Miss Collins. We will take Miss Collins first. We have nothing much against her, except that we know very little about her, that she is obviously an intelligent young woman, and that she has only been here a year."

"She lied about the dog, you said," I reminded him.

"Ah! yes, the dog," Poirot gave a peculiar smile. "Now let us pass to Tredwell. There are several suspicious facts against him. For one thing, the tramp declares that it was Tredwell who gave him the parcel in the village."

"But Tredwell can prove an alibi on that point."

"Even then, he could have poisoned Mrs. Waverly,

pinned the note to the pillow, put on the clock and swept out the Priest's Hole. On the other hand, he has been born and bred in the service of the Waverlys. It seems unlikely in the last degree that he should connive at the abduction of the son of the house. It is not in the picture!"

"Well, then?"

"We must proceed logically—however absurd it may seem. We will briefly consider Mrs. Waverly. But she is rich, the money is hers. It is her money which has restored this impoverished estate. There would be no reason for her to kidnap her son and pay over her money to herself. Her husband, now, is in a different position. He has a rich wife. It is not the same thing as being rich himself—in fact I have a little idea that the lady is not very fond of parting with her money, except on a very good pretext. But Mr. Waverly, you can see at once, he is *bon viveur*."

"Impossible," I spluttered.

"Not at all. Who sends away the servants? Mr. Waverly. He can write the notes, drug his wife, put on the hands of the clock and establish an excellent alibi for his faithful retainer Tredwell. Tredwell has never liked Mrs. Waverly. He is devoted to his master, and is willing to obey his orders implicitly. There were three of them in it. Waverly, Tredwell, and some friend of Waverly. That is the mistake the police made, they made no further inquiries about the man who drove the grey car with the wrong child in it. He was the third man. He picks up a child in a village near by, a boy with flaxen curls. He drives in through the East Lodge and passes out through the South Lodge just at the right moment, waving his hand and shouting. They cannot see his face or the number of the car, so obviously they cannot see the child's face either. Then he lays a false trail to London. In the meantime, Tredwell has done his part in arranging for the parcel and note to be delivered by a rough looking gentleman. His master can provide an alibi in the unlikely case of the man recognizing him, in spite of the false moustache he wore. As for Mr. Waverly, as soon as

the hullabaloo occurs outside, and the Inspector rushes out, he quickly hides the child in the Priest's Hole, and follows him out. Later in the day, when the Inspector is gone and Miss Collins is out of the way, it will be easy enough to drive him off to some safe place in his own car."

"But what about the dog?" I asked. "And Miss Collins lying?"

"That was my little joke. I asked her if there were any toy dogs in the house, and she said no—but doubtless there are some—in the nursery! You see, Mr. Waverly placed some toys in the Priest's Hole to keep Johnnie amused and quiet."

"M. Poirot." Mr. Waverly entered the room. "Have you discovered anything? Have you any clue to where the boy has been taken?"

Poirot handed him a piece of paper.

"Here is the address."

"But this is a blank sheet."

"Because I am waiting for you to write it down for me."

"What the—" Mr. Waverly's face turned purple.

"I know everything, Monsieur. I give you twenty-four hours to return the boy. Your ingenuity will be equal to the task of explaining his reappearance. Otherwise, Mrs. Waverly will be informed of the exact sequence of events."

Mr. Waverly sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"He is with my old nurse, ten miles away. He is happy and well cared for."

"I have no doubt of that. If I did not believe you to be a good father at heart, I should not be willing to give you another chance."

"The scandal—"

"Exactly. Your name is an old and honoured one. Do not jeopardize it again. Good evening, Mr. Waverly. Ah! by the way, one word of advice. Always sweep in the corners!"

JAMES HAY, JR.

THE FAIR CHANCE

SHE opened the door of her flat, and at once stood face to face with the ruin of her world. It had come as she had pictured it a thousand times. Unexpectedly. Suddenly. Without a chance to save herself.

The man whose ring had brought her to the door stood, without taking off his hat, staring at her out of quick eyes, an inoffensive smile drawing up the corners of his mouth. His round, slightly fat face conveyed an impression of habitual watchfulness. In the seven years that had passed since she had seen him he had not changed. The long, stubborn line of his jaw was the same; so was the suggestion of lionlike strength in his thick, stooped shoulders.

"Hello, Mayme," he said in a rumbling baritone, the motion of his lips scarcely perceptible.

For a moment she could not speak. She leaned with her right shoulder against the door casing, her left hand still on the knob. Her face had gone instantly cold and gray, like a winter's twilight. She looked at him drearily.

"Leavit," she said at last, slowly, "Leavit, the detective."

"Yes, Steve Leavit," he said. "Guess I'll have to come in, Mayme."

Unsmiling now, he was a man intent on his business, making no attempt to exult over her. He acted as if the offense for which she was wanted had been committed that day instead of seven years ago.

Resistance was out of the question. She stepped back and threw the door farther open. Prematurely gray hair and the lines that come from courageous fighting against

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hardship made her look older than her 25 years. But even with the pallor of fright she was almost handsome. Her face had strength in it.

When the detective had crossed the threshold he waited for her to close the door and precede him down the narrow hall. She went with flying feet. On her way to answer his ring she had seen that the clock on the bookcase in the living room pointed to six minutes to six. And her husband was invariably home by six! The thought drummed through her brain: "George will be here any minute—in five minutes at the outside! I've got to make it easy for him, be worthy of him!"

As she traversed the short distance of the hall her mind worked with incredible swiftness. Her whole beloved past flashed into view: her wedding day four years ago; George's saying he would never believe bad, not even a little bad, of her, no matter what anybody might tell him; the happiness of being trusted and honored always! She locked her teeth against the moaning cry, "My dear happiness!"

In the well kept but cheaply furnished little living room she turned and faced Leavit. She noticed with surprise that she was weak, like a woman suffering heat prostration. Her tongue was rough, as if it had sand on it. Irregular, jagged patches of white fire flashed past her eyes. She put her hand on his arm.

"Mr. Leavit, give me a fair chance, will you?" she implored him, the words coming in a rush. "I'm married now, and my husband will be here any minute, and I don't want him to see me arrested. The shock, the grief of it, would kill him! Don't take me before eight-thirty! Give me till eight-thirty! That's only two hours and a half, Mr. Leavit. I'll make him go out by then, and then I'll leave a note for him and go with you!"

Leavit took off his black derby hat and put it down beside the clock on the bookcase. The living room was so small that, when he did that, he could sit down in a chair beside the center table without taking another step. He did so, moving with a slowness that tortured her.

"What do you mean by a fair chance, Mayme?" he asked, looking up to her standing on the other side of the table. "Ain't seven years a fair——"

"I mean a fair chance to make it as easy for him as I can, to get away so it will hurt him as little as possible!" she interrupted, through her clenched teeth. "He'll be here in three minutes now. In three minutes or sooner! He——"

Leavit put up his hand. "Not so fast, Mayme! Not——"

"I'm not Mayme any more!" she corrected him. "I was Loula Bentley when he met me, out in Chicago, making my own living. His name's George Paxton. He's a bookkeeper. And we've been married four years. And he loves me. Loves me so! And I—O, my God, Mr. Leavit, I love him so it's going to kill me having to leave him this way and tell him I—I was on the books at headquarters for stealing! And I never stole a thing in my life! Not a thing! You, you who've hunted me for seven years, Mr. Leavit, you know I'm innocent! I——"

"But," Leavit objected, with a lift of his shoulders, "you were indicted for stealing, and you jumped your bond. You——"

She interrupted him again, coming around the table and taking hold of him, grasping his arm with both of her hands.

"I didn't do it!" she said, fiercely, her utterance so hurried that she spoke in a hoarse whisper. "I didn't! I was living among crooks because I couldn't help it then, but I never did a crooked thing in all my life. I stayed straight. You know it! And you've got to give me a chance."

He shook himself free of her grasp, showing his impatience.

"Why?" he demanded. "Why have I got?"

The question infuriated her. She fought down an impulse to laugh in his face, to revile him.

She went back to her chair opposite his and looked over his shoulder at the clock on the bookcase. Two minutes to six! Two minutes more! In a second she

prayed her whole heart wordlessly: "O, to be worthy of George! To make this thing easy for him!" Her chest hurt her. Her tongue was sanded again, and thick. But she answered him without hesitation, pleading.

"Because you're a human being!" she said, leaning toward him, her weight on her clenched fists resting on the table. "And you've got a wife! And you've hunted me for seven years, and a few hours won't matter to you, but they'll mean a little less of hell for me—and for my husband!"

She went back to him and, sinking to her knees, clasped his right shoulder. Her fingers dug into his muscles until they bruised him.

"I saved your life once, Mr. Leavit!" she said. "You remember that, don't you? I was 16 years old then. 'Hump' Browning had it all framed to get you; and I got on to it, and I went to you and told you about it. Yes, you do remember it! You know you do! So I'm asking you now to pay me back for that—such a little pay! He'll be here in a few seconds! Just a chance to write him a note and explain and keep him from seeing a policeman lead me away! It isn't much. Just two hours and a half, so I can ease this blow to the man who's built and furnished and kept up heaven for me. Do that for me, Mr. Leavit! Do——"

They heard footsteps in the corridor outside the flat. She clung to him, her fingers kneading his shoulder.

"He's coming!" she said, in a whisper. "Just the two hours and a half! I'll tell him you're an old friend of mine, just dropped in, just found out where I was!" She shook him, staring with hot eyes into his.

"All right, Mayme," he growled quickly. "But no tricks; remember!" He caught her hand and made her feel, through his coat below the left arm, the outline of the automatic pistol slung there.

She got to her feet, and as she rose put up a shaking hand to smooth back her disheveled hair. Her husband, who got away from work later then she, always left the latchkey to her. He was ringing the doorbell now.

She went to the door into the little hall and gave him her usual welcoming hail. "Coming, Georgie, pronto!"

Her wish to succeed in this desperate play was so intense that it hurt her like a burn. She thought, "I've had to do some good acting before; I can do it now." And at once her mind seized a greater measure of command over her body. She felt the tide of her blood thrust the pallor from her cheeks. The thickness went out of her tongue. By the time she got to the front door and opened it her hands were steady, her voice nearly normal. Only her breathing betrayed her; it was still fast from the pounding of her heart. He noticed it as she stood on her tiptoes and put up her face for his kiss.

"Why, you're——" he began, with a look of worry.

"Excitement!" she answered his unvoiced inquiry gayly, and stood aside, drawing his attention to the other end of the hall, where, she knew, the plain clothes man was standing watching her every move, listening for even a hint of treachery to her bargain with him. "Here's a surprise for you, George!"

She went forward with him a step or two and introduced him. "This is the great and only husband, Steve!" she said, a proud playfulness in her tone. "And, George, this is Steve Leavit, an old friend of mine, an old playfellow even when we were kids in Philadelphia."

Paxton put out his hand, with a warm smile. He was a pleasant faced fellow in his early thirties, slender and a little taller than the average. His paleness, from constant indoor work, was in striking contrast to his black hair and eyes.

"I hadn't seen him for nearly eight years," she rattled on, preceding them into the living room. "He hadn't an idea I was in New York! Just happened to run plump into me on Thirty-third street!"

She found herself possessed of two intelligences. Her laughing chatter to the two men was a curtain behind which she flayed herself with the scourge of bitterness. Why, she asked herself contemptuously, had she been fool enough to believe that the effrontery of living under the

New York authorities' noses would be her greatest protection? Why had she trusted to her white hair and a retired life to save her? In view of this catastrophe now, her folly made her frantic.

Leavit played his part naturally. The gameness of the woman compelled his admiration. He caught himself wondering whether she would last it out or give him the job of carrying her off in screaming hysterics.

But he watched both her and Paxton with incessant keenness; and once his alertness was rewarded. Before she went back to the kitchen to finish her interrupted task of getting the dinner he caught sight of their reflection in a mirror above the piano when they evidently believed themselves unobserved. Paxton, with uplifted eyebrows, flashed her a look of inquiry and mock jealousy, a move of his head indicating the visitor. Her reply to that was a *moue,* a mouth puckered as for a kiss, and widened, laughing eyes, all of which said as plainly as words could have done, "He's all right; and don't you dare to pretend even that you're jealous!" The intimate understanding in this byplay, the unqualified loyalty and devotion of each to the other expressed in their interchange of glance and smile, gave the detective a clear idea of how great their happiness must be. He was glad he had given her the chance.

His vigilance, however, did not relax. For seven years this woman, who had successfully defied his skill and the resources of the whole country's thief hunting machine, had never been entirely out of his mind. Her escape had been a blot on his record. Now she was under his hand at last, he proposed to give her no opportunity to get away a second time.

His surveillance, he knew, was flawless. During his entire stay in the flat, save for that one brief scene reflected in the mirror, she made no attempt to speak a word or make a sign unknown to Leavit; and Paxton, reassured by her *moue,* devoted himself to making his wife's friend feel at home.

While she was in the kitchen putting the chops and

the two vegetables into dishes she worked automatically, her mind busy with the unceasing resolve, "To be worthy of him in this! To make it easy for him!"

The men went together to the bathroom to wash up.

When she called them into the little box of a dining room the meal was on the table. Throughout the dinner she led the talk, making it almost entirely a series of reminiscences of her early girlhood in Philadelphia, with frequent descriptions of persons and places that kept Paxton interested.

Leavit, saying little and maintaining his hawklike scrutiny of them, noted their good comradeship. He saw, too, that her hand never once trembled. Her voice had a fresh and girlish note in it, an overtone faintly suggestive of bubbling laughter. Experienced as he was in the fears that come into human eyes, he could detect no shadow of anxiety, even in hers. The longer the thing lasted the more he admired her.

Under her surface show of happy remembrance she was calculating desperately, "I've got to keep it up only till eight-thirty! Only till eight-thirty! If I can hold out that long! O, if I only can!" At intervals which seemed to her ages long she allowed herself the painful luxury of a turn of her head and a glance into the living room to tell, by the clock on the bookcase, what time it was, how many minutes more of this heartbreaking pretense she had to endure. Now and then she flexed the muscles of her arms and legs to throw off the clutch of a lethargy heavy as paralysis. The forced smiling made her lips stiff; they felt like cardboard. She was alternately flaming hot and freezing cold.

"Seven-thirty!" she thought as they finished the pie which she had brought from the delicatessen on her way home. "Seven-thirty, and I've got to make the next play!"

She looked across the table at Paxton and spoke in a tone of banter.

"George," she said, with a slant of her eye and a low laugh that made Leavit partner in the teasing, "here's where you get a pleasant surprise! I'm going to send you

out to the movies now all by yourself! My meeting with Steve has brought up something I want to talk over with him."

Paxton gave Leavit a swift, keen glance before he looked at her, a flush stealing into his cheeks. He laughed like a man embarrassed.

"Talk over what?" he asked her.

"O, be a good sport!" she said, urgency sounding through her levity. "Be a sport, and get out for the evening. All joking aside, this may bring us some profit. And," she concluded, with a slight catch in her throat which she could not prevent, "you'll know all about it soon, anyway."

Leavit was moved by that to come to her help. "Really, Mr. Paxton," he said, seriously, "it ought to do you good and me, too. You'll see later why I wanted to talk about it first with only your wife."

Paxton hesitated, undecided. She had an agonizing longing to catch him by the throat, to shake him into speech, to shout, "Yes! Yes! Yes;" to throw off all this terrible burden of fear and caution.

"O, George," she said, sharply, "don't be silly! Have you forgotten I know as much about business as you do?"

To Leavit's surprise, Paxton did not answer that at once, but sat looking down at the table cloth, the line of a frown deepening between his eyebrows. The detective saw that, in this pause, Mrs. Paxton's lower lip hung a little away from her teeth, that her eyelids lifted and fell rapidly.

She was thinking: "Why doesn't he say yes and go out of here? I can't stand it! I've got to stand it! Nearly an hour more! One hour!" She prayed with an intensity which, she thought, should lift her husband out of his chair.

Paxton recovered himself handsomely. "I beg your pardon, both of you," he said with a start from his abstraction. "I had made another appointment for this evening, for both of us—but I can arrange it." He turned to Leavit with a smile. "It's a meeting with a fellow and

his wife that might mean a little money for me. But, before I go, have a cigaret."

Leavit heard the long, quivering sigh with which the woman welcomed her husband's decision. She thought "The worst is over now!" But with even that small degree of relaxation the white patches danced before her eyes again; the faintness, as from extreme heat, was upon her in waves. She had to brace herself, like a man setting himself to resist a rush of superior numbers.

"Yes, thanks," Leavit said, accepting the cigaret.

Mrs. Paxton led the way into the living room. She made no move to follow her husband into the hall, where, on coming in, he had hung up his coat and hat. Without the strength to carry on a conversation during these, the crucial moments of her loving deception, she heard him shuffle his feet while getting into his heavy coat and then, with quick, even stride, go down the hall to the corridor door. Leavit, in his chair by the center table, was watching her, the everlasting wariness in his face.

When the door slammed she sprang out of her chair as if propelled by an outside and irresistible force. Her movement was so unexpected and violent that Leavit started half from his seat to put a hand on her shoulder.

She smiled at him pitifully, drooping against the table. Her face was crimson, her eyeballs suffused with blood, her lips abnormally red and full.

"Nervous!" she explained, her voice thin and weak. "It's been terrible, Mr. Leavit!"

"I guess it was," he said, "but——"

"I'm burning up!" she complained, moistening her thickened lips with the end of her tongue. "Burning up! But I did get away with it, didn't I?" she asked him, a pathetic pride in her voice. "Didn't I do all right?"

"Yes; you've got nerve, all right," he said. "But your time's up now. Let's go."

He made a move to push his chair back.

She went with slow, tottering step from the table to the little desk in the corner on his left.

"No," she begged; "not yet! You said you'd give me

a fair chance, a chance to make it as easy for him as I could! Don't spoil it, Mr. Leavit. Let me write him the note explaining. Just a short note! You wouldn't be so rude to——"

"All right," he stopped her, his impatience growing. "But don't be long! There ain't much etiquette in arresting people."

She sat down at the desk and picked up a pen. Tears were in her eyes at last. They went over, falling down her cheeks. She made him uneasy. Going on like that, she might lose her self-control any minute!

"O!" she wailed, and, dropping her voice, appealed to Leavit. "What can I say to him? How is a woman to tell her husband that she's gone, gone forever, for years, to jail, to the penitentiary on framed up evidence? How can I——"

She was halted by a stentorian command, sharp as the crack of a whip.

"Put your hands up, Leavit!" ordered her husband, at whom she was gazing now over Leavit's head, her bloodshot eyes big with bewilderment.

Leavit, wheeling in his chair to face the hall door, in which Paxton stood, reached at the same moment toward the pistol under his coat.

"Stop it, or I'll shoot!" Paxton said, in a clipped, tense voice. "And put your hands up! And you, Loula, don't you move!"

Leavit, having seen Paxton's revolver, obeyed and sat motionless. Paxton came into the room and stood beside his wife.

Leavit, watching her now with an acuteness surpassing his previous shrewd intentness, noted that she, absorbed in her husband's movements, was in reality utterly surprised. Employing to the utmost all his genius for observation, he saw, in the next moment, suspicion born in her eyes, and on top of that came her fear. Not the same sort of fear with which she had recognized him at the door two hours and a half ago. This was a bitterer fear, a more devastating thing. He saw that it crushed her; her

chest sank in; her shoulders came closer together; and an artery in her neck, as she held her head back to watch her husband's face, throbbed as if to beat down its walls.

Thought travels fast in a moment like that. The detective, clearly realizing his own helplessness, was able also to follow the woman's feelings. They were, he perceived, a troop of torture. She realized, he saw, that she had endangered her husband's trust in her by mercifully trying to hide her past from him; she was horribly afraid that he was convinced of her guilt.

But what guilt? Leavit saw her eyelids flutter wider to the shock of that speculation, saw even that she asked herself, in her lightning-like analysis of this new thunderbolt fallen upon her, whether Paxton, groping in the dark of suspicion and ignorance, had not tried her unheard and doomed her to punishment for a crime worse than that for which she had been indicted.

After Paxton's command, she was the first to speak.

"No!" she said in a half-choked voice. "Not that, George! You've got it wrong! I'll tell you exactly—Mr. Leavit will say I'm telling the truth."

"Be quiet," Paxton interrupted her, keeping his glance always on Leavit. "Keep quiet, Loula," he repeated, without harshness.

"Now, sir!" he said to Leavit. "There won't be much etiquette to this, either!" He addressed his wife again. "Loula, take that pistol away from him and give it to me."

She did so with trembling fingers, putting the gun into Paxton's left hand. She sank slowly into the chair nearest him, her eyes never leaving his face. Leavit could see that he himself meant little to her now; that bewilderment and fear of her husband were equally lively in her expression. It was as if she wept aloud, "How will this man whom I have deceived punish me?"

Paxton spoke to Leavit. His voice, pitched low and tense, carried a deadly and unqualified menace.

"I could have killed you just now and got away with

it," he said, "the moment I heard you identify yourself as a copper about to arrest my wife. You see, this gun's got a silencer on it. But I heard her say just now that you'd promised her a fair chance. That stopped me long enough to find out what it meant. Loula, what was it?"

"It was this way," she explained breathlessly, without a glance at Leavit. "He was going to take me to the station house before you came in, but I knew it would break your heart to see me arrested, and I asked him to give me a chance to write you a note explaining, to make it as easy as possible for you, darlin'. We would have met you on the stairs if we had gone out then. And he did just what I asked. He was fine, George; just fine! And I've never stolen a cent in all my life!"

"I see," Paxton resumed, ignoring her disclaimer. "Now, then, Mr. Leavit, I'm going to give you a fair chance in return for that. If you take it, all right. If you don't, I'll kill you where you sit, as sure as the sun rises."

His manner displayed an inevitability that was unmistakable. There was no bluff in him. Leavit, looking up into his eyes, knew that he would do what he said.

"Put your hands down if you want to," Paxton suggested. "Now, to let you understand what this fair chance means, I'm going to explain things to you. Unknown to my wife, I've known for five years that she was a fugitive from justice and indicted for theft."

Leavit, with a swift side glance at her, saw her lips fall open and her left hand go to her heart as if to crush down its leaping pulse. A great wonder was upon her. She might as well have cried out, "How much more splendid is this man than I have ever suspected!"

"But that," Paxton was saying, "didn't mean anything to me, because I knew her. She is a good woman. I know she wouldn't steal and has never stolen. She's my woman. She's my whole world and all my life, because, without her, the world wouldn't be worth fooling with. Do you get that? Understand what this woman, my woman, means to me and what I think of her?"

"Yes," Leavit replied curtly.

"Good," said Paxton. "Then you understand that I will do anything to save her. She's worth saving. She loves me. I am not low lived enough to hand her over to the law to make a disgraced, sorrowing, and broken thing of her when she's got every right under the blue sky to live out her life, happy, loved, and useful. It's my duty to save her. It's your duty," he said, contempt in his pronunciation of the word, "your duty to hand her over to ruin and wreckage.

"But before I'll stand for that," he added, through his set teeth, "I'll kill you. I will, so help me God! Now, here's your fair chance. If my wife will say that you can be trusted to keep your promise I'll let you walk out of here the moment you say you will never arrest her or tell anybody else who or where she is."

Keeping both gun and eye on Leavit, he asked his wife, "What do you say, Loula?"

Leavit did not look at her. For all the two men saw of her, she was alone in the world, unprompted, unguided. She tried to think and could not. Her one vague feeling was thankfulness that her husband had the upper hand. She found herself saying mentally again and again, "Thank God! My dear happiness! Thank God!" The ticking of the clock was the only sound in the room. The men were motionless, waiting.

After a long pause she managed to say aloud, "Yes," and then, with greater strength, "Yes, O, yes! He'll be on the level."

Leavit gave no sign of relief.

"All right, then," Paxton brought the thing to its climax. "What do you say, Leavit?"

His wife, seeing that his mind was made up to shoot if necessary, framed in her consciousness one sentence of prayer, "Make him promise!" But the task of influencing Leavit's decision was more than she, drained now of all vitality, could undertake. Her thoughts, wild on the treadmill of confusion, arrived at nothing. The idea of murder was awful to her. Suspense closed down upon her like the walls of a room coming together. A pressure banded her

forehead. Her breath moved her lower lip with a "plup" sound. She thought, by keeping her mind full of her husband, by shutting Leavit away from her thought, to make her agony more supportable.

Leavit at last reached his decision. It was a choice between surrender and certain death. He did not have a fighting chance even.

"You've got me," he said, with a steady look at Paxton. "I can't see any good in getting killed because I'd like to arrest a woman who's innocent, maybe." He shrugged his shoulders and added: "I promise you she'll always be safe from me."

When the door of the flat clicked shut behind him they listened until his footsteps died away down the corridor. Paxton was standing at the living room door into the hall, his wife ar the table in the living room. They faced each other.

He was trembling violently. The gun dropped unnoticed from his hand. His face was like a limp white rag with two holes in it through which little fires burned. He tried to laugh, making an unpleasant sound of it.

A cold sweat came out suddenly on her forehead and, in little torrents, ran down the sides of her face. Her lower lip was curiously twisted. She put up her arms a little way weakly, holding them out to him.

"Well," he said, going to her and putting an arm around her, "we did it! Did it exactly the way we've always said we would—if we had to! And you were fine!"

"It came so unexpectedly! It scared me to death!" she said, shuddering. "And, O, George, I hate so for us to have to do it because of me!"

"Don't say we didn't have a right to!" he commanded her lovingly. "You are innocent. And a little acting like ours here to-night suits me a whole lot better than letting a bunch of thick headed cops ruin a good woman's life!"

JAMES HAY, JR.

THE CAPTURE

VINAL sat in a plain deal chair near the cold fireplace, his body leaning slightly forward, his hands resting lightly upon his knees. With the exception of two brief interruptions he had been in that position for more than twelve hours, but there was in the lines of his still figure that which suggested desperate expectancy, incessant alertness.

At eleven o'clock that morning he had risen from the chair by inches and tiptoed to the window and, gently pulling aside the thick, dirty curtain, had looked out through a chink in the closed shutters to glance at the two policemen patrolling the pavement outside. In that journey he had not made a sound. Not a board had creaked. There had not been even so much as the scraping of one part of his clothing against another. And again at five o'clock in the afternoon, creeping, a master of silence, he had repeated the pilgrimage and had seen the same patrol. At the back of the house, he knew, was a third blue-coated man.

On the far side of the room was a door and beyond that door were Pole and Dowell, two of the men who had murdered old Sothoron and old Sothoron's wife. He knew they were there. How he knew it he could not have explained. So far as his trained senses had been able to discover, there had come from the next room during his long wait the sound of neither voice nor motion. He simply felt that they were on the other side of the wall.

He had acted on the supposition that they would do what thousands of others of their kind had done, double on their tracks and return, if possible, to their old refuge.

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He had figured that if they could enter the house in spite of the one policeman at the rear and the two at the front, he in his pursuit of them could accomplish the same feat.

As he thought of this deduction on his part, and its impending result, he experienced the greatest excitement he ever allowed himself to feel. It was only a question of minutes, at most not more than an hour, before he would have the laugh on the police commissioner. He would make Finkman and his men look like fools; and the famous Bloomer agency, with its cocksure chief, would find itself cheated of its prize at the very time when the city and the entire country expected it to turn its best trick. He liked neither the commissioner nor Finkman nor the Bloomers. They had never given him a fair chance, and he had a nice sense of revenge. Single-handed he would deliver two of the three murderers to justice that evening.

If he had waited a lifetime he could not have had a better setting for the drama he was about to enact. The newspapers the next morning would grip the imagination of the whole country and lead it irresistibly into the dark room of that miserable house in which he now sat. Because the public mind had been inflamed by the recitals of the outrage, it would read eagerly, even delightedly, the details of the capture of the criminals.

For three days the search for the murderers had spread out, spun itself into a mighty web. The furor had been created because of the prominence of the victims, not because of any particular brutality in the commission of the crime. While one man had watched outside the other two had crept into the bedroom, chloroformed the husband and the wife and ransacked the house. To all intents and purposes, so far as the burglars were concerned, the double murder had been an accident. Instead of stupefying, as they had intended, they had killed.

But immediately the authorities and the newspapers had come forward with the cry: "The chloroform gang!" They recognized in the tragedy the work of the Chloroform Colonel and his two associates, Dowell and Pole.

And because the owners of millions had been done to death, he, Vinal, sat there in the cold, dark room and calculated to a nicety the details of every move he must make to accomplish this triumph unaided, to achieve it in such a way that he—he alone—would stand head and shoulders above the mass of men who made the pursuit of crime their profession.

He had entered the house before daylight that morning, coming up like a specter out of the wet blackness of the back alley, slipping past the sleepy policeman and disappearing into the areaway in perfect silence. His progress on stockinged feet from the basement to the fourth story of the rickety house had been as quiet as death and laborious enough to wring the sweat from his body.

And yet he should have had no real fear of interruption. The police, having searched the place from top to bottom two days before, had contented themselves with placing the three pickets on the outside—in case the murderers should seize on the perilous chance of doubling back. And if his marvelous intuition had served him right and any of the three had returned to wait for a last play for freedom, they would have made no outcry if he had stumbled against them. They would have realized the futility of further resistance. The average crook, dislodged from his last ditch, makes no fight. In view of these things his care, his fear of outside interference and his incredible patience were sure signs of the eagerness with which he looked forward to the capture.

The time had come for him to act, to put into execution the plan which he had elaborated. On the other side of the flimsy door there were only two men. He knew this. In the first place the Colonel, their leader, would never have beaten back aimlessly to an old haunt. Rather than pen himself up in a place in which either starvation or a second search would end his career, he would make a daring try for more open ground. Realizing that all the machinery of the law was combing clean the retreats of the city, he would strive in every way to get beyond the

scope of such a chase. Only the lower intelligence of Pole and Dowell would hold out to them the promise of ultimate escape by such a ruse.

The room was very cold. Vinal wanted to shiver, but checked the impulse. In all the time he had been there he had not moved a muscle unnecessarily. The darkness was in the shuttered, curtained house like a tangible, palpable object. It seemed a solid, oblong formation against which the glare of the street lights beat in vain. And the silence inside was almost as bad. In that vast, crashing, shrieking city it was a separate thing, unchanged and unmoved by the ordinary uproar humanity makes at night. It began to get on his nerves, until he mentally took hold of himself and assured himself that there was nothing uncanny in the affair. It was simply a matter of one man sitting moveless and soundless in one room and two other men equally moveless, equally silent, in the other.

He got to his feet—and it took him two full minutes to reach an upright position—his hands held slightly away from his sides. He moved his fingers, crooking them and straightening them out methodically time and again to get out of them the stiffness that had been caused by the cold. He raised his right foot and put it forward through the darkness in one long step, but when he placed it on the bricks of the hearth nearby it was with a motion as soft as the falling of down. Once on the hearth and away from the danger of creaking boards, he began to rise slowly and repeatedly on the balls of his feet in such a way that the exertion called into play all the muscles of his legs. He did this fifty times, more rapidly toward the last, and always continuing the movements of his fingers.

He went through with it scientifically, utilizing the knowledge he had gained in the gymnasium. He had begun to roll his head from side to side when he noticed that his neck, unshaven for thirty-six hours, rasped against his collar. With slow deftness and short, tedious movement he took off his cravat and, leaning over, placed it carefully on the bricks to one side. He did not drop it. The

collar was more difficult. He moistened his fingers with saliva and applied them many times to the buttonholes. When he slipped the first flap from its holding the buttonhole was as soft and wet as if it had been dipped in a river.

His straining ears, ready to receive every sound, could not hear his own work. Outside there was the constant chorus of the city, punctuated now and then by the shrill horn of an automobile or the wail of wheels against the cold steel rails on the Elevated, and continuously there came up from the pavement directly underneath the monotonous pit-pat of the brogans of the slowly promenading policemen. Several times he heard voices guying the officers.

"Watch the Sherlock Holmeses doing a marathon!" one of the street gamins called out.

And another:

"Why don't you go down to the station and wait for 'em to walk in?"

But there was no sound from the next room. He had taken off the collar and laid it down beside the cravat when the thought came to him: "Suppose they're not there!" He paused, still bowed over, and listened as if to reassure himself. He heard nothing. And yet the old intuition came back to him. They were there. That was the only explanation of why the newsboys at that very moment were crying the extras telling of their remarkable escape. They must be there. They would have thought of no other place when the chase behind them had grown too hot.

He did not falter once in his infinite precaution, his far-reaching calculation of just what each muscle would do, of how he must place each hand and each foot to avoid even the chance of noise. The slightest thing, he knew, would split that block of silence like the thundering blow of a trip-hammer. The blackness pressed upon him and stung him as if he had been made up of the ends of live wires, wires which, in his unnatural imagination, he thought would carry straight to the ears of the two in the

other room the ghost of any sound. But he forced himself to calmness. He could not afford nervousness.

As plainly as if it had been in the room he suddenly heard the rattle of the knob of the door of the house. One of the policemen, varying the monotony of his vigil, had rattled it aimlessly. In an instant he became one degree more alert. The eager desire of his mind sharpened still more his hearing. There had come from the other room a sound. He listened—listened—listened hungrily, painfully. The noise was not repeated. It had not been enough, in the first place, to make a scratch on the hard block of the silence which hemmed him in. And yet he was sure, certain.

He leaned over again and, resting his left hand on the bricks, thrust his right slowly into the fireplace and up the chimney the fraction of an inch. He wanted some of the soot, but none of it must be dislodged and fall into the fireplace. He put the soot with well-considered smears upon his cheeks and nose and forehead. Then, regaining his upright posture, he slowly turned up the soft collar of his coat and buttoned the garment tightly about his slender figure.

He stood hesitant once more, cataloguing in his mind all the things he had done, the limbering and softening of the muscles and ligaments of his body, the removal of his collar and tie, the disfiguring of his face—this being done for two reasons: The blackness of the soot would remove the possibility of his face looming up like a white blur before the men he intended to capture; also, if they discovered him too soon, he would stand a chance to fraternize with them as being, like them, a fugitive. That idea struck him as grimly ludicrous. What would they, the murderers, think if they became convinced that he, fleeing because of some minor offense, was closeted with them in their last house of refuge?

With soft touches he felt that the revolver in the right-hand outer pocket of his coat was as it should be and that the one on the other side was convenient to his immediate reach. He was ready, he told himself. Finkman and the

Bloomers, he reflected, could not have prepared themselves one-half so well for what he was about to do.

Vinal was not a coward. No man with fear in his heart ever could have gone through with that day's watching. But as he put out his right foot and started on that long, apparently interminable journey across the short expanse of flooring between him and the door, the slightest noise of his own making would have thrown him into a panic. Keyed up to an abnormal pitch, his nerves raw from their tension, he was emotionally wide open to any impression, any idea, any happening foreign to his definite undertaking.

It was as if he carried in the balls of his feet premonition of noise. In his trip to the door he traveled at right angles to the boarding of the floor, and he knew that in order to avoid the creaking of the planks he must follow the line of one of the crosspieces underneath the boarding. He found this by instinct and he kept to it unswervingly in his progress.

His sense of direction was extraordinary, weird; the more so because every step he made was almost a half-circle, since he did not dare to tip forward in the ordinary manner. In each groping stride his foot went out to one side from him and forward at the same time, so as to avoid the danger of one trousers leg brushing against the other. And he was guided entirely by the mental picture of what he had seen grayly when the daylight had been sifting through the chinks of the shutters—by that and by the instinctive accuracy with which his light, catlike feet followed the safe part of the flooring.

Within a yard of the door, he stopped midway in the act of letting his weight swing with wearisome slowness from his right foot to his left. He had had neither food nor drink for twenty-four hours, and in the anguished nervousness of his progress he had allowed his mouth to slacken, half-open. It was like that of a runner who, nearing the close of a race, gasps for breath. And all of a sudden he realized that the inhalations went into his lungs with what threatened to be the sound of a low

whistle. He closed his lips and hung motionless, balanced halfway in his stride. He listened. There was nothing except the roar of the city—that and the pit-pat of the policemen's feet.

He put out his hand and moved it forward slowly, slowly as the ages.

The tips of his fingers thrilled and pulsated as if the nerves were not covered by the epidermis. And when they touched the doorjamb he had to hold himself together to keep from starting suddenly, so hard and abrupt seemed the touch when they struck against the woodwork.

Very slowly, almost imperceptibly, his long, lean figure crouched forward more and more until his ear was on a level with the keyhole. He waited five minutes—eight minutes—ten minutes. His hearing was reinforced by his hope of discovering them and his fear of their discovering him. All his senses reached forward into that other room. So great was his concentration that the noises of the city and the echoes of the footsteps down below were at last a million miles away.

He could see the two men exactly as they had been pictured in the newspapers—Pole, little, round-shouldered, pusillanimous; and Dowell, heavy-set, broad-shouldered, bull-necked. Now, more than ever, he knew that they were there—Pole bunched up, terror-stricken, white-lipped, and Dowell a big, immovable lump. But he could not understand why he did not hear their breathing. It was natural that they should not move about. Their consuming fear of discovery would account for this. And yet the fact that they made no sounds whatever was beyond him. If they were breathing, he felt, the sound of it must come to him in that virgin silence.

Then he heard. It was a whisper, low, guarded, but to him it sounded like the crack of a gun, so much so that instinctively and in silent swiftness he put his hands to his revolver pockets.

He listened.

"If they get the Colonel we've got a chance."

He knew that the voice was Pole's. It was a whisper,

but to his ears, incredibly trained, it had in it all the characteristics of a voice. It sounded like the talk of a little, shrill-toned man.

"They won't get him." Dowell's whisper in reply was like Dowell, slow and heavy.

The silence closed in again.

"For God's sake, we've got to do something! We'll starve to death here."

Pole's whisper, so low that it seemed scarcely to make a ripple on the ocean of stillness, was freighted nevertheless with a coward's despair.

Vinal, exerting himself as if he wrestled with ten men, had heard every syllable of what had been said. He found himself balanced on his toes, his right arm straightened out behind him, his left pointed forward and downward, as if he were poised agilely and perfectly for instant movement. He hung, light as a feather, in the silence, and yet his muscles were so tense that he looked, too, like a man supporting tremendous weight.

"Don't talk." Dowell ended the whispering.

Vinal put his hand on the doorknob. His fingers touched it as lightly as grains of dust, and, while all his consciousness was centered on the gigantic task of turning it without noise, somewhere in the back of his mentality he was cursing the necessity of fooling with a thing so pregnant in its possibilities for the ruin of his plan.

It seemed to him afterward that he used up a year of his life in turning the knob. At every fraction of the turn he paused, knowing that, if he went the thousandth of a second faster, the inevitable grating of the latch would follow. He was seized by an insane desire to wrench the door open and charge in with thunderous noise, discharging his guns and shouting at the top of his voice. The silence—silence which was necessary to him—was growing too big, too mysterious for him. It was a torture that multiplied itself every moment.

When he had the latch free of the hasp, there came a repetition of the careful tactics he had already followed. Just as there had been a certainty that the lock would

creak, there was the dead-sure thing that the hinges would cry out if urged by more than snail-like motion. As the door opened he began to calculate through his sense of touch just when to bring it to a stop, and to go through again the crucifying process of letting the latch creep back to the point from which he had started it. While he did this he could hear the breathing of the two men, and gradually, by painful degrees, he began to sense their positions in the room. They were nearer to the window than he had thought and they faced the window. That was the first piece of good fortune he had had. He could work on them from behind.

He took his hand from the knob and the door was still. He took one slow step into the room. It was a motion that required minutes. Three times the ball of his foot touched the flooring and drew back. Each time he knew that, if he had put the weight of ten pounds on that step, the flimsy flooring would have cried out. At the fourth attempt he felt safe—and he could not have explained the feeling to save his soul.

"I wish I had some water," Pole's little whisper rang out.

Involuntarily there flashed through Vinal's mind a story he had read years before of the carrying power of certain actors' voices. Pole, he thought, undoubtedly would have made a good actor.

Before he took the next step he got both the pistols from his pockets and held them ready. He was possessed by a mania for speed, a wild desire to make a rush, to liberate his muscles from the captivity of care, to throw from his limbs the manacles of tediousness. But as he went forward, gaining at every step a clearer consciousness of where the two men sat, he did not hurry in the slightest. Each contraction of his muscles was as slow as it had been at the hearth in the other room. And even at this moment, when the whole fabric of his success hung on the slender chain of a few silent seconds, he thought with astonishment of how perfectly his mind controlled every smallest atom of his body.

The climax came exactly as he had planned it. He ended the torture of slowness with a rush of motion and cut the stillness with a whisper. With one lightning-like sweep the revolvers flashed through two feet of space and came down, muzzles forward, on the backs of the two men's necks. He could tell by the way the flesh at the end of the right-hand revolver gave way that the little Pole shrank down in his chair as far as he could. The left-hand gun met the thickness of Dowell's neck and moved only a few inches.

"If you make a sound I'll pull the trigger!" he said, and he put the threat in a murmur scarcely louder than had been the whispers he had heard.

For nearly half a minute the group was motionless—only Pole's breathing began to come and go with a hissing sound.

Finally Dowell broke the stillness.

"What do you want?" he asked aloud, but in a subdued tone.

"Don't do that again!" Vinal's whisper was sharp enough to be like a blow. "I want you both. I've got you. Now listen. There's another man in this house, and if you make a sound he may make a getaway. You are going with me quietly—or get shot."

There began in Pole's throat what would have developed into a whimper, but Vinal stopped it with his thumb.

"Now," he whispered his directions, "I'll guide you out of this room through the next into the hall and down to the front door. You go the way these guns press you."

Dowell had made no sign of emotion, except that his breathing was faster. Both he and Pole rose to their feet and turned as Vinal indicated with the revolvers. To be more certain in his guidance he had thrust the muzzles of the revolvers inside their collars.

"Where are your shoes?" he asked, whisperingly softly.

It was Dowell who replied:

"Over in the corner."

"They are not in the way? We won't stumble against them?"

"No."

He was still desirous of silence. Nobody must enter the house to interfere with his work, his capture. He would deliver them at the front door, on the pavement, to the sleepy policemen. But the three could not traverse three flights of stairs without some noise, and this angered him. Whenever his captives made a board creak he gouged them mercilessly with the revolvers; but he did not whisper.

Quietly, with reasonable quickness, they reached the vestibule. Pole, weak and small, was flinching under every thrust of the revolver against his collarbone. Occasionally he trembled violently. Dowell, knowing that the game was up, went deliberately, almost calmly, as directed by the cold steel inside his collar.

Once or twice Vinal was seized by the impulse he had felt upstairs to shriek, to cry out, to end the thing with a storm of blows and shots. He had been tortured past human endurance ever since entering the house. But whenever he felt the impulse to give way the thought of Finkman and his men, of the Bloomer operators and of the commissioner himself nerved him on for the few remaining minutes.

At the door he flashed his hand from Pole's shoulder and left the revolver hanging in the little man's collar. It was only for the two seconds required to snap back the latch and fling open the door. He grasped the revolver again and thrust the two men before him into the brilliantly lighted street.

"Here!" he called out imperiously. "Come here, you men! Here they are! Grab 'em!"

Pole and Dowell stood blinking in the light and the two policemen sprang forward, willing but dazed. One of them, the fellow with a red mustache, paused before he leaped, and blew his whistle.

In the twinkling of an eye they had the two captives. As if by magic the street was filled with flying feet and excited cries. Men and women ran from all directions, and on the crest of the wave came other policemen, forming quickly a circle round the two white-faced silent men.

Vinal, with blackened face, shouted excitedly to the red-mustached policeman:

"Got 'em upstairs! Did it all myself! Why, you poor fools—you and your detectives—they've been up there all day!"

Two of the officers rushed into the house to search it again. Another put in a call for a patrol wagon.

From the crowd that was closing more tightly all the time about the captives and the police rang yells and jeers:

"Chickens come home to roost!"

"Oh, you chloroform!"

"Where's de guy dat nipped 'em?"

"Ain't dat little gink a nice lookin' slice of pie!"

When the wagon, carrying its new load of captive wretchedness, rumbled over the cobblestones to the stationhouse five blocks away the spectators followed only to be stopped at the doorway.

Inside, the desk sergeant was inclined to get out of the situation all the pleasure possible. He grinned affably at Dowell and Pole, who stood near the railing while their clothing was being searched by rough and ready hands.

"I guess the Bloomers got you," he commented. "Well, it'll be quick work with you! As soon as we get the Colonel the three of you will hang—hang nice and high."

This was too much for the nerves of the little, ratlike Pole. He burst into wild hysterical laughter, and fell forward against the desk, beating his skinny hands on the hardwood. He began to shriek, and one of the policemen put a hand over his mouth.

He wrenched his head away.

"Aw!" he squeaked, the tears streaming down his face. "You poor fools! The Colonel's got a big start on you! The man who brought us down the steps was the Colonel. That was Vinal himself. He's made another getaway!"

HULBERT FOOTNER

THE MURDER AT FERNHURST

In order to rest and to escape from the strain of the tremendous publicity that followed upon her success in the famous case of the Smoke Bandit, Madame Storey retired for a few days to the house of her friends, the Andrew Lipscombs, who lived in the Connecticut hills remote from any neighbor. I accompanied my employer, since she insisted that I needed a holiday as well as herself. We simply locked up our offices and went away, leaving the telephone to ring, the mail to accumulate and the hordes of curiosity-seekers to mill around the door as they would.

We supposed that we had kept the place of our retreat a secret from all, but that fond hope was soon dissipated. Late on the night of our arrival as we were playing bridge with our friends in the blessed quiet of their house, Madame Storey was called to the telephone. She returned to the card table with the grave, remote look that I knew so well, her *working* look, and my heart sank.

"Well, Bella, we have another case," she said.

I laid down my cards. It was useless to protest of course.

"There's been a terrible affair down at Frémont-on-the-Sound," she went on; "a gentleman has been found in his study, shot dead, and a young girl has been arrested. The man who called me up, evidently the girl's lover, begged me to come and try to get her off. His voice, coming through the receiver, had an extraordinary quality; young and manly; shaken with grief and agitation; yet proud and confident in his girl; it won me completely. I said I would drive right down."

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"Murder?" said Mr. Lipscomb, startled; "and so close to us? Who's been murdered?"

"Cornelius Suydam."

"No!" cried our host, springing up. "Why, he's the great man of the neighborhood. His house, Fernhurst, is one of the show places! . . . Who is said to have killed him?"

"The girl's name is Laila Darnall."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Lipscomb stared at my employer in stupefied amazement. The former was the first to find his voice. "Merciful Heaven!" he gasped. "She's his ward! Said to be richer than he is. An exquisite young creature; a sort of golden princess; we see her being whisked about in automobiles from one great country house to another. Oh, this will create a terrible sensation! . . . Who called you up?"

"He called himself Alvan Wayger."

"I never heard of him."

"A sort of princess!" Mrs. Lipscomb echoed, aghast; "with everything in the world a girl could wish for! Why on earth should she want to kill her guardian?"

"I don't know," said Mme. Storey. "We must go and find out. . . . I suppose you will lend me a car and a chauffeur, Andrew."

"Certainly. I'll go with you for a bit of extra protection. I suppose you'll be out the rest of the night. It's near midnight now."

The distance was about twenty miles, and we made it in better than thirty minutes. Fernhurst proved to be an immense country house built of stone in the elaborate style of twenty-five years ago, and standing in its own private park. The house was all lighted up, but we found it perfectly deserted except for a solitary constable on guard, and the young man who had telephoned to Mme. Storey. He was a striking looking fellow with a shock of shining black hair, and fiery dark eyes. Somewhat rough in dress and abrupt in manner, but with a glance full of resolution and capacity. It was that kind of terribly direct glance which is disconcerting to ordinary

persons, but it is always a sure passport to Mme. Storey's favor.

In spite of his grinding anxiety his whole face softened at the sight of my employer's beauty. It was a fine tribute. "I never thought you would be like this," he murmured.

They wasted no time in exchanging amenities. The young man explained that everybody in the house had just gone down to the magistrate's in the village, where a sort of preliminary hearing was about to be held.

"We mustn't miss anything that takes place at that hearing," Mme. Storey said crisply. "Drive on down, Bella, and take notes of the proceedings. I will follow as soon as I have looked over the ground here."

I was directed to a large old-fashioned double house standing at the head of one of the village streets. This was the residence of "Judge" Waynham, the magistrate. Already there were half a dozen cars standing in the road, and a knot of people whispering at the gate. A strange sight at midnight in the quiet village! Mr. Lipscomb, who did not wish to intrude himself in any way, waited in the car. Inside, there were people all over the house. No one questioned my presence. The magistrate had not yet come down stairs and everybody was standing about with frozen, horrified faces. A maid servant was threading her way back and forth between them like a distracted person.

The judge's office was in the back parlor on the left hand side, and everybody tried to push in there. A quaint room which suggested the era of 1885. I saw the accused girl sitting on a little sofa with her face hidden on the shoulder of a youngish woman in black. Picture a slender, silken girl wearing a flowerlike evening dress of printed chiffon and a white fur cloak which had slipped back. I could not see her face, but the short fair curls that showed against her slender neck were somehow most piteous. She was making no sound, but her delicate, girlish shoulders were shaken with sobs. It was too dreadful to think of anything so fresh and young and fair in connection with murder.

As more and more people crowded in, they opened the

folding doors into the front parlor. The distracted maid servant was bringing in chairs. I maneuvred myself alongside a comfortable village matron who looked promising as a source of information. She whispered to me that the lady in black was Mr. Suydam's housekeeper, Miss Beckington. A good-looking woman of thirty-five I should have said, who appeared younger; very modish, very efficient one guessed, though at present the tears were rolling down her pale cheeks as she held the girl close. Miss Beckington was something more than a mere housekeeper, my informant said, since she was a person of good family herself, and perfectly capable of acting as hostess to Mr. Suydam's guests. She was wearing a plain black morning dress, a close fitting hat and a raccoon coat.

Near these two sat a portly, nervous-looking elderly gentleman, fingering his watch chain. This I learned was "Judge" Gray, the girl's lawyer.

The magistrate entered the room. He had forgotten to brush his hair and it stood straight up all over his head in a very odd fashion. A rosy, kindly old gentleman, he was so nervous and distressed he scarcely knew what he was saying. "Who are all these people?" he demanded. "After all this is my private house!"

Nobody answered him, and he was obliged to accept the crowd. He had the constable shepherd everybody but the principals into the front room. I got myself a chair in the second row where I could use my notebook without being conspicuous. Judge Waynham sat at his desk facing the rest of us, and a scared village stenographer took a place beside him with *her* note book.

"Lavell," said the magistrate sharply, "you made the arrest, I assume. It is your place to lay a charge."

This was the chief constable, a tall lanky man with a good-humored, heavily seamed face. Like everybody else connected with the case he seemed completely overcome. He stood beside the magistrate's desk hanging his head as if he were the guilty one, and mumbled in a scarcely audible voice:

"I charge Miss Laila Darnall with the murder of her guardian, Cornelius Suydam."

One could feel a shiver go through the room.

Suddenly the girl sprang to her feet, showing us all a white and agonizing face, the face of a terrified and uncomprehending child. Her slender frame was racked with sobs, but her eyes were dry. I shall never forget that desperate face. Though the other woman and the lawyer tried to silence her, she cried out: "How could I . . . how could I have done such a thing? Don't you believe me? Have I not a friend here? Why has everybody turned against me? I am the same girl!" Perceiving three handsomely dressed ladies sitting in the front room (these I learned were her cousins) she ran to them crying: "Helen! Isabel! You believe me, don't you? You know I could not have done such a thing. Tell them all that you believe me!"

"Hush, Laila, hush!" said one of them in cold correct tones. "Of course we believe you. But let the proceedings go on."

Laila turned from her in despair. "Haven't I a friend here?" she cried.

Miss Beckington held out her arms. "Come, dear," she said tenderly, while the tears rolled down her cheeks. "I am your friend. I know you could not have done it!"

The girl flung herself into her arms. "Oh, thank you! thank you!" she murmured, weeping freely at last. "Forgive me because I have not always been friendly towards you. Once I thought you were cold and unfeeling."

They sank down on the sofa together. It was very affecting, the more so because one could see that Miss Beckington was ordinarily a somewhat hard and self-controlled young woman.

"Do you wish to answer to this charge, my child?" asked Judge Maynham.

"I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" she cried without raising her face from Miss Beckington's shoulder.

"The prisoner pleads not guilty," murmured the magis-

trate to his stenographer. "Who is your complaining witness?" he asked the constable.

"Mr. Lumley, your honor, Mr. Suydam's butler."

This man stepped forward to testify. A large, soft-looking man with a dead white skin, he was obviously educated and intelligent, and made a very good impression. He kept glancing at his young mistress commiseratingly. His obvious unwillingness to testify against her, gave his evidence all the more deadly effect.

While he was speaking Madame Storey and Alvan Wayger entered the front parlor from the hall, and took seats in the darkest corner. I had a great curiosity concerning this interesting looking young man who was said to be the heiress' lover. The village matron was still beside me. Calling her attention to him, I asked who he was.

"Oh, that's Alvan Wayger," she said indifferently. "He's nobody in particular. New people here. Haven't made friends much. They say he's a clever inventor, but I never heard of his inventions. Lives with his mother in a little house across the railway tracks. That's his mother against the wall across the room."

I saw a plain, middle-aged woman glancing at her son and his unknown companion with that peculiar jealousy that one sometimes sees in the faces of mothers with an only son. It is a sad thing to see.

Madame Storey had draped a light veil around the brim of her hat so that she could see all without being recognized.

Lumley the butler testified as follows:

"My name is Alfred Lumley. I have been employed by Mr. Cornelius Suydam as butler for the past your years. At the present time the household consists of Mr. Suydam, his ward Miss Darnall, his housekeeper Miss Beckington, myself butler, Mrs. Finucane cook, and five maids. There is also Dugan the engineer, who has a room in the basement; Leavitt the gardener who lives with his family in the cottage at the park gates, and Pressley and Gordon, chauffeurs, unmarried men who board with the gardener's wife.

"I retired to-night shortly before eleven. There were no guests in the house, and I believed at the time that everybody was in bed except my master, whom I left reading in his study, as was his custom. The study occupies a separate wing of the house, somewhat cut off from the other rooms. I was in bed, but had not fallen asleep when I heard the sound of a muffled shot. Had I been asleep I should probably not have heard it. But I thought it came from inside the house. I sprang out of bed and flung on my clothes. I heard the clock of St. Agnes' strike eleven. My room is on the third floor of the house. I didn't attempt to waken any of the women folks. I ran down the two flights of stairs. I knocked on the library door. No answer. I tried the door. It was locked."

"One moment," interrupted Judge Waynham, "was it your master's custom to lock the door when he was in his library?"

"No, sir. No indeed, sir."

"Well, go on."

"I called loudly. There was no answer. My first thought was of robbers. The safe was in the library. I could not tell how many there might be, and I was afraid to venture outside the house alone. So I run down to the basement and wakened Dugan. He was provided with a gun and electric torches. He threw on his clothes and came with me. We went out the front door and around the house to the library windows. There is a big bay with French windows opening directly on the terrace. The windows were open . . .

"Cool as it was?" interrupted the magistrate.

"It was my master's custom, sir. . . . The room was brightly lighted. We saw . . ." Lumley hesitated, and a shudder went through his stout frame.

"Go on," prompted Judge Waynham.

"My master was seated at his desk in the center of the room. His head had fallen forward on the desk blotter. There was a bullet hole just back of the left temple. His blood had spread over the desk and was already dripping to the floor. He was dead. The door of the safe

stood wide open. Beside it lying open and face down on the rug was a little memorandum book. I recognized it as a book my master always carried on his person. On the open page was written down the combination of the safe. The safe was full of papers, none of which appeared to have been disturbed, but there was a little drawer which had been pulled out and emptied. An empty jewel box lay beside it."

"Do you mean to say," interrupted Judge Waynham, "that Mr. Suydam sat in that brightly lighted room late at night with the windows open and unshuttered?"

"Such was his custom, sir," said Lumley, deprecatively. "I had ventured to remonstrate with him about it, but he only laughed at the idea of personal danger. The windows were protected by copper screens of course. The murderer had fired through the screen, and had then raised it to enter."

"Well, go on."

"Dugan and I searched outside with the electric torches. Bordering the terrace is a flower bed, and in the loose earth of the bed we immediately found the tracks of the murderer where he had come and where he had left again. Only one set of tracks. They appeared to be those of a large man wearing rubbers, but there was a peculiarity in the tracks . . ."

"Please explain yourself."

"Well, in the middle of the print of each foot there was a roughness which suggested to both of us that the rubbers had been tied to the wearer's feet by strips of rag or something of that sort."

The man's story was almost too painful to follow. A deathly silence filled the room which suggested that his hearers were actually holding their breaths.

"We followed the tracks to the edge of the flower bed," he went on. "In the grass we lost them, but knowing that a person leaving a place in a hurry usually runs in a straight line. I kept on in the same direction. This took us across a rose bed in the center of the lawn, and here I found the tracks again. By taking a line with the library

window and the rose bed we were enabled to find the tracks again where the murderer had struck into the woods. A little way in the woods we came to a place where the earth had lately been disturbed . . ."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, a hole had been dug, and hastily filled in again. We dug there and found firstly a pair of old overshoes gray with dust and dried mud; secondly a thirty-two calibre automatic pistol; thirdly several pieces of diamond jewelry tied up in a woman's handkerchief. Dugan immediately recognized the overshoes as an old pair that he used in the winter when he shovelled snow. He had last seen them lying beside the furnace pit where they had been dropped and forgotten." Lumley hesitated, with a piteous glance in the direction of his young mistress.

"Go on! Go on!" said Judge Waynham impatiently.

"The tracks that led away from that place had been made by a woman," said Lumley very reluctantly. "She was wearing what is called, I think, a commonsense shoe, that is a shoe with a moderately broad toe and a low heel. The tracks led us towards the main driveway, but we lost them in the grass before we got there, and of course the hard driveway revealed nothing. So we turned back towards the house meaning to call up the police." His voice sank. "As we approached the house we saw a figure standing in the driveway, its back towards us. The figure of a woman. We stepped into the grass to avoid giving warning of our approach. A moment later I recognized . . . Miss Darnall . . ."

A low murmur of horror escaped from the listeners.

"When I touched her she screamed," Lumley went on, "I thought she was about to faint . . ."

The girl suddenly cried out: "Was that strange? Was that strange? A man coming up on you in the dark without warning . . ."

Judge Gray and Miss Beckington quieted her.

"I led her into the house," Lumley went on unhappily. "As soon as we got in the light I saw—though she was dressed just as you see her now, that she was wearing

shoes with broad toes and low heels. Moreover the gun was quickly identified as one which had been given her by Mr. Suydam some months ago. It was his opinion that everybody ought to be furnished with the means of personal defense. One shot had been fired from it. The handkerchief was also Miss Darnall's. It has her initials embroidered in it."

There was a silence. The girl's shuddering sobs could be heard. Miss Beckington patted her shoulder.

Judge Waynham wiped his agitated face on his handkerchief. "Well, is that all you have to say?" he asked.

"Not quite all, sir," said Lumley in an almost inaudible voice, while we in the front room leaned forward to hear. "I had Miss Beckington roused up, and I delivered Miss Darnall into her care. I forced Miss Darnall to take off one of her shoes—I thought it my duty to do so, and Dugan and I returned to the woods with it. I had read somewhere that the proper procedure was not to attempt to fit the shoe into the suspected tracks, but to make a new impression alongside. This I did. I am sorry to say that the impressions correspond exactly. . . . That is all I have to say, sir. When I got back to the house I telephoned for the police."

Lavell the constable laid the sport shoe on the desk.

"One question," said Judge Waynham. "How could Miss Darnall ever have got hold of those overshoes? I assume she was not in the habit of visiting the cellar."

"I asked that question of Dugan, sir," said Lumley. "He told me that a week ago when he was confined to his bed by an attack of tonsillitis, Miss Laila came down to his room to visit him. To reach his room she had to pass the furnace. She must have seen the overshoes then."

The girl tore herself out of the protecting arm of Miss Beckington. Her soft young face worked piteously. "It's a lie!" she cried. "I never saw the overshoes until to-night! It's all lies! I . . . I . . ."

Judge Gray put an arm around her shoulders. "My child," he said soothingly, "be silent! This is neither the time nor the place. You must be guided by me . . ."

She sprang to her feet. "Let me be!" she cried hysterically. "I *will* speak! I won't have these people thinking I did this awful thing! I can explain everything. I have nothing to conceal. . . . I had been out of the house ever since nine o'clock," she went on wildly and incoherently. "As for my shoes, I always put on sport shoes when I went out in the park at night. Would they have me wear slippers? . . . Since nine o'clock! I heard no shot. I didn't know anything was the matter. But when I got back to the house I found that the hall was lighted up and the front door standing open. So I was afraid to go in. That's why I was standing there looking at the house. . . . My handkerchief . . . my handkerchief, I still have it with me. One wouldn't carry two. In the pocket of my cape . . ." Turning, she searched with frantic trembling hands in the folds of the cape. "It's here . . . I'll show you . . ." Then a despairing cry: "Oh, it's gone! . . . I swear I had it a while ago!" She dropped on the sofa shaken with fresh sobs. It was an unspeakably painful exhibition.

"What did you go out of the house for?" Judge Waynham asked gently. ". . . You don't need to answer unless you wish."

"Yes, yes, I will answer," she cried, striving hard for self-control. "I went out to meet my . . . to meet the man I am engaged to marry. He wasn't allowed to come to the house, I was forbidden to see him. That's why I had to meet him by stealth. I'm not ashamed of it. It's Alvan Wayger . . ."

A soft, long drawn Oh! of astonishment escaped from the listeners. In a village where everybody prided themselves on knowing everything this was a startling disclosure. The heiress and the poor young inventor! Everybody looked at the handsome dark young man who sat there with a perfectly blank mask upon his face. So far as I had observed the two had not once looked at each other during the proceedings.

Judge Waynham energetically polished his glasses. When he recovered from his surprise he looked relieved. I think

we all had the same thought. Perhaps after all, here was a perfectly natural explanation of the girl's movements. "Will you answer a few questions, Mr. Wayger?" asked the Judge.

"Certainly, sir," said the young man, marching up to his desk.

"Miss Darnall met you in the park at Fernhurst to-night?"

"Yes, sir. We had an appointment to meet at nine o'clock at a certain stone bench under an elm tree near the entrance gates."

"How long did she remain with you?"

"About two hours, sir."

"Can't you tell me exactly what time you left her?"

"No, sir, I didn't look."

"Did you then go straight home?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long does it take you to walk home?"

"Fifteen minutes, sir."

"At what time did you reach home?"

"I cannot tell you exactly, sir. I took no notice."

Here there was an interruption from the front room. "If you please, Judge, I can tell you," said a bitter voice, Mrs. Wayger, the young man's mother, had risen. She cast a look of dislike on the girl. "I was lying awake when my son came home," she said. "After he was in his room I heard the clock in St. Agnes' steeple strike eleven." She sat down again.

Young Wayger received this without a sign of emotion beyond lowering his head slightly. His face was not hard, but simply inscrutable. For my part I could not help but sympathize with his determination not to betray his private feelings before that gaping crowd.

Judge Waynham's face fell. "So," he said heavily, "then it appears you must have left her at quarter to eleven or earlier."

Wayger made no answer.

"Miss Laila," said Judge Waynham, turning to the girl, "if Mr. Wayger left you at quarter to eleven, and Lumley

found you at quarter past eleven, what had you been doing during that half hour! You need not answer unless you wish."

We all held our breaths waiting for what she would say.

"I will answer . . . I will answer," she stammered. "I hadn't been doing anything. . . . Just walking up and down the driveway. I was greatly troubled in my mind. I was trying to think . . . to think of some way out!"

It was a deplorably lame answer. In spite of his iron self-control I saw a spasm of pain pass across the young man's face. I think we all gave the girl up for lost then. Judge Waynham's kindly old face was heavy with distress. He tapped his glasses on his desk blotter while he considered. Suddenly a gleam of hope lighted up his eyes.

"The circumstances are unfortunate, most unfortunate," he said, "but no motive for such a terrible deed has been shown, or even suggested. . . . Mr. Wayger, I would like to ask you a few more questions."

The young man signified his readiness to answer.

"What were the relations between Miss Darnall and her guardian?"

"I object!" said Judge Gray instantly.

Judge Waynham wagged a soothing hand in his direction. "This is only a magistrate's hearing," he said. "You will have your day before a jury later." He repeated his question of Wayger.

That young man's face hardened. "I don't know that I care to answer that," he said firmly. "It's not up to me to repeat what I learned from Miss Darnall in confidence."

At this juncture Mme. Storey raised her clear, distinct voice from the back of the room. If you had heard that voice in the dark you would have known that it belonged to a notability. "Mr. Wayger, I advise you to answer," she said. "The whole truth must come out. By your apparent reluctance you are only prejudicing Miss Darnall's interest."

All the people goggled at the veiled woman, then looked at each other. "Who is this?" you could see them saying.

The young man instantly changed his attitude. "Very

well," he said, "the relations between Miss Darnall and her guardian were bad. He was a very oppressive guardian. He had peculiar notions. It is well known that Miss Darnall's income runs into hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, but he would not allow her a cent of spending money."

"What?" exclaimed Judge Waynham.

"It is quite true, sir. Of course she was provided with everything a fashionable young lady might be supposed to require. She was encouraged to buy whatever she wanted in the shops and have the bills sent in. But she had no money to spend. She was not allowed to drive her own car. In fact she was never allowed out unless accompanied by a chauffeur or a chaperon. All this was very galling on a girl of spirit.

"We wished to get married," he went on in his quiet and self-respecting manner, "but that was quite out of the question of course. I have all I can do to make ends meet as it is, and Mr. Suydam had absolute control over Miss Darnall's money for two years longer, and partial control for four years after that. He had no use for me at all. He made no bones of calling me an imposter and a fortune hunter. That didn't bother me at all—I have my work to do—but it distressed Miss Darnall very much."

"But this has been going on for some time," suggested Judge Waynham; "this would not account for Miss Darnall's special trouble of mind to-night. Can you tell me what caused that?"

"Certainly, sir. It was what we had been talking about all evening. I have completed an invention. I need not go into detail about it. Properly applied, my invention would revolutionize a certain important industry. Well, I have received an offer from the corporation which controls that industry. Miss Darnall was strongly opposed to my accepting the offer. It was not a good offer, and what's more, there is reason to suppose that they mean to suppress my invention, as is sometimes done. Miss Darnall wanted to finance it, so that we could start manufacturing on our own account in competition with the trust. It was not the

money she was thinking of so much as the publicity. She believed it would make me famous. But Mr. Suydam had positively refused to let her have the money."

"And the matter was at a critical stage?" asked Judge Waynham.

"Yes, sir. I am forced to accept this offer. Inventors must live."

"Hm!" said the judge unhappily. "What were the conditions of the late Mr. Darnall's will?"

"I see Mr. George Greenfield in the next room," Wayger said. "He is Mr. Suydam's attorney, and he can answer that question better than I can."

Mr. Greenfield was called upon. He was a handsome, middle-aged man with a youthful air, and a good tempered expression, the sort of man that children instinctively take to. As he came forward, he cast a deeply compassionate look on the unfortunate young girl. In answer to Judge Waynham's question, he carefully explained the provisions of her father's will. I need not repeat them beyond stating that Mr. Suydam was given absolute control of her affairs. In case of Mr. Suydam's death the will provided that Mr. Greenfield himself was to succeed him as Laila's guardian and trustee.

"Do you corroborate what this young man has told us respecting Mr. Suydam's attitude as guardian?" Judge Waynham asked him.

"I'm sorry that I must," he said regretfully, "for Mr. Suydam was one of my best friends. It was not mere harshness that made him behave in this manner. He was actuated by the best of motives. He looked about him and he saw how the young people of to-day were running wild, as he put it. It was to save Laila from that that he kept her under such strict control. I have often attempted to show him that he was mistaken in his method, but he was a very self-willed man."

"Had you heard anything about this invention of Mr. Wayger's?"

"Yes. Only to-day I lunched with Mr. Suydam at Fernhurst. Miss Darnall waylaid me as I arrived, and carried

me to her sitting room where she told me all about it, and implored me to use my influence to persuade her guardian to advance the money necessary to finance Mr. Wayger's invention. But, knowing Mr. Suydam as well as I did, I told her it was useless. The poor girl was much upset. 'Can nothing be done?' she cried."

"And what did you reply?" asked Judge Waynham.

Mr. Greenfield started to answer, then as a sudden realization came to him, caught himself up, and changed color painfully. "I would rather not answer that," he said in a muffled voice.

"I must insist," said Judge Waynham.

"I answered jestingly," said Mr. Greenfield anxiously. "It had no significance whatever. I said: 'Nothing short of giving Cornelius a whiff of poison gas.' It was only in jest."

"Oh, quite, quite!" said Judge Waynham, and both men laughed in a strained fashion. But the incident created a *very* unfortunate impression.

Judge Waynham seemed to give up hope. His kindly face sagged with weary discouragement. He hesitated, tapping the blotter with his glasses. It was obvious that he could not bear to condemn the daintily-reared girl to a cell. "I am reluctantly forced to order that Miss Darnall be . . ."

Mme. Storey interrupted him. Rising, and throwing back her veil, she said in that arresting voice of hers: "Mr. Magistrate, before you close the case, if I might be permitted to put a few questions in the light of what I have learned . . ."

Judge Waynham's jaw dropped in pure astonishment. "But, Madam, who are you?" he asked.

Alvan Wayger answered for her. "Madame Rosika Storey," he announced.

A general exclamation escaped from all. Every head in the room turned towards my employer as if moved by a common lever. For the moment even the unfortunate Laila Darnall was forgotten. At this time Mme. Storey was the most talked of woman in the country, I suppose. "The

cleverest woman in New York" the newspapers were calling her. Everybody present had the feeling that her entrance into the case would make their insignificant village famous.

The good little magistrate flushed and stammered in his gratification. "But of course . . . of course. . . . I am honored, Frémont is honored by your presence amongst us, Madame. Won't you be good enough to join me on the bench . . . I mean at my desk . . ." He relieved his feelings by suddenly shouting for the maid. "Nettie! Place a chair for Madame Storey."

Serenely oblivious to the goggling eyes, my employer seated herself beside him. "A prima facie case appears to have been made out," she drawled, "still there are one or two little matters that might be gone into further."

Instantly everybody realized that the case, instead of closing, was only just starting.

"Miss Darnall required a large sum of money," Mme. Storey continued; "therefore the few pieces of jewelry that were taken could have been of no use to her. The theory is, of course, that she opened the safe and took the jewelry merely to make it appear that robbers had done the deed. . . . A very, very clever plot! Well, if she was such a clever plotter why didn't she plot a little further, and leave a way open to return to the house? She must have realized that some one would likely be awakened by the shot? There is a discrepancy here."

I saw a hope dawn in the magistrate's harassed face.

"I have made a hasty examination of Mr. Suydam's study," Mme. Storey went on, "and . . . er . . . some other rooms in the house. Unfortunately for my purposes, the body had already been removed to Mr. Suydam's bedroom. I should therefore like to ask the butler a question or two concerning it, if I may."

Judge Waynham made haste to give an assent.

"Lumley," said Mme. Storey, "you told us you left your master reading when you went to bed. But when you found his body he was sitting at his desk. This was not a position for reading, was it?"

"No, Madam. When I found him his fountain pen was still grasped in his right hand, and his left hand was spread on the blotter in such a way as to suggest that it was holding a paper. He was undoubtedly writing at the moment he was shot."

"But the paper itself was gone?"

"Yes, Madam."

"This suggests that he was writing something which was of interest to the murderer," remarked Mme. Storey, "who therefore carried it away. That's all for the moment. thanks. . . . On Mr. Suydam's desk," she went on to Judge Waynham, "I found an ordinary calendar and memorandum pad on the top leaf of which he had written: 'Write G. G.' then a dash and the word 'will.' Underneath was another memorandum: 'Write Eva Dinehart.' Now I take it 'G. G.' is Mr. Greenfield."

That gentleman spoke up for himself.

"Yes, Madam. Such was Mr. Suydam's nickname for me."

"Had you had any discussion with him today about his will?"

"No, Madam, it was not mentioned."

"Have you his will?"

"Yes, Madam, I drew it up. It is kept in my safe."

"Had you had any talk with him that would make it necessary for him to write to you."

"No, Madam. Whatever it was, it must have come up after I had gone."

"What time did you leave him?"

"Three o'clock."

"Thank you. . . . Now, Lumley, what did your master do after Mr. Greenfield had gone?"

"He had Miss Beckington into the library 'm," the butler answered with a wondering air. None of us could see which way this questioning was tending. "It was their day for going over the household bills."

"Can you tell me anything about what took place between them?"

"N . . . no, Madam."

"Why do you hesitate?"

"Well, there was an incident which was a little unusual."

"What was that?"

"Mr. Suydam called on the phone, and asked me to connect him with Central. Ordinarily he would let me get him what number he wanted."

"You listened?" suggested Mme. Storey with a bland air.

"Well . . . yes, Ma'am," said the butler in some confusion. "Mr. Suydam asked for information. He read the names of three New York business firms over the wire, and asked to be given their telephone numbers. I remember the firms. They were: N. Hamill and Sons; Nicholas Enslin; and Dobler and Levine. And information reported to him that no such firms were listed."

"What did your master do after Miss Beckington left him?"

"Went to the country club to play golf, Madam."

"And Miss Beckington?"

"She went into the city by train."

"Rather a hasty trip, wasn't it?"

"So it might seem, Madam."

"When did she get back?"

"Just before dinner."

"Carrying several parcels?"

"Why, yes, ma'am," said the butler with a look of surprise, "now that you mention it."

"Wasn't that rather unusual?"

"Yes, ma'am. Ordinarily everything would be sent."

"That's all, thanks." Mme. Storey turned to Judge Waynham. Her beautiful face was as grave as that of some antique head of Pallas. "I then asked to be shown Miss Beckington's room," she went on. "The door was locked, but the constable obligingly forced it for me. I am aware that this was a high-handed proceeding on my part, but I was sure that the owner of the room would forgive me if her conscience was clear. . . . In the room was a desk which I likewise forced. In a drawer of the desk I found

these papers." From a sort of reticule of black velvet that she carried, Mme. Storey took a sheaf of papers and spread them before the magistrate.

He blinked at them owlishly.

"They are, you see, blank bill heads for the three firms whose names you have just heard mentioned; N. Hamil and Sons; Nicholas Enslin; Dobler and Levine. . . ."

"But what does it mean?"

Mme. Storey held up her hand to bespeak a moment's patience. "I returned to the library. I found in a cabinet all the household bills for many months past. Upon consulting them I found every month a considerable bill from each of these mythical concerns. . . ."

"You don't say, Madam. . . . !"

"It means," said Mme. Storey with her grave air, "that Miss Beckington has been systematically swindling her employer out of hundreds of dollars monthly."

Every eye in the room turned on the housekeeper. Laila Darnall jerked herself free of her arms, looking at her in astonishment and dismay. Miss Beckington, who had been pale before, now looked livid. There was an awful terror in her eyes. Her attempt to smile in a scornful and superior way, was something you could not bear to look at. I mean it seemed indecent to see a human creature expose herself like that.

"I take it that Mr. Suydam discovered the thefts today," said Mme. Storey. "That brings us back to the will. Mr. Greenfield, is Miss Beckington mentioned in her employer's will?"

"Yes, Madam. A comfortable legacy."

"I thought so. Naturally, his first act upon discovering her treachery would be to write to you to cut that out. Now as to the second name on the memorandum pad: this Mrs. Eva Dinehart happens to be an acquaintance of mine. She conducts a special sort of employment agency. You go to her for help of a superior and confidential sort such as a social secretary or a lady housekeeper—need I say more?"

"But the murder, ma'am, the murder?" asked Judge Waynham excitedly.

"I am establishing the motive," said Mme. Storey gravely. "Dishonor and disgrace faced this lady. At the very moment he was shot, her employer was writing the letters that would have ruined her."

"But have you any evidence?"

"I found none in her room—or next to none," said Mme. Storey dryly.

Miss Beckington preened herself, bridled, smiled in that ghastly, would-be contemptuous manner.

". . . But I recommend that you have her searched," added Mme. Storey quietly.

At these words, the woman sprang up electrified. "I won't submit to it!" she cried in a shrill hysterical voice, and made as if to bolt for the door.

Lavell the constable seized her. She struggled like a wildcat. Everybody looked on dazed. It was inexpressibly shocking to see the elegant Miss Beckington suddenly reduced to such a state.

"Take her into the dining room," said Judge Waynham. "Lumley, will you please help him?"

Mme. Storey added to me: "Miss Brickley, you search her while the men hold her."

It was not a job I relished, but I had no recourse other than to obey. To make a long story short, I found firstly, in her stocking a handkerchief bearing Miss Darnall's initials; secondly, fastened inside the lining of the raccoon coat a pair of sport shoes; and thirdly, the strangest of all, wound around and around her body under the top part of her dress a ladder made of thin strong cord. Fastened to one end of it were two steel hooks. I returned across the hall, and laid these things on Judge Waynham's desk.

"I thought so," said Mme. Storey offhand. "You see she had had no opportunity to dispose of them." She lifted up the objects one by one. "The handkerchief she stole from Miss Darnall as she sat beside her, hoping thereby to make the poor girl's story sound more incriminating.

The shoes you see are replicas of Miss Darnall's from the same manufacturers. Miss Beckington bought them today I have no doubt. She knew that Miss Darnall always wore such shoes in the park. The rope ladder she used to leave her room and to return to it. If you look for them you will find the marks made by the hooks on her windowsill."

At this sudden upset of the case, every vestige of order disappeared. All the people came pressing into the back room crying out, and attempting to congratulate the one or to abuse the other. Miss Beckington shrank from them. Judge Waynham's mild face crimsoned with anger, and above all the racket I heard his trembling voice.

"You miserable woman! You deliberately set out to fasten a horrible murder on this helpless child. In all my experience I have never known the like!"

Miss Beckington had collapsed now. All the fight had gone out of her. "I didn't! I didn't" she wailed. "I tried to make it appear that a robber had done it!"

"Your purchase of the shoes doesn't bear that out," said the judge sternly. "All through the proceedings you sat there with your arms around her whispering hypocritical comfort in her ear, while the evidence was produced against her. It is horrible!"

Miss Beckington's voice rose almost to a shriek. "I knew they wouldn't hurt her!" she cried. "Young and pretty as she is, and with all her money, no jury would convict her! She was safe!"

"Silence!" cried the magistrate. "Your excuses aren't helping you any! . . . Lock her up!" he said to the constable.

When Miss Beckington was removed, the crowd threatened completely to overwhelm Mme. Storey and the young lovers in their well meant efforts to congratulate them. Mme. Storey regarded this demonstration with good humored dismay. I opened the door into the hall to allow them to slip out, and held it until they had secured themselves in the dining room opposite. Over there I

presume, the lovers thanked Mme. Storey in their own way for saving them. I was not present at the scene.

Presently the young couple escaped through a side door of the house, but were seen as they ran hand in hand for a car, and the crowd pursued them cheering.

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

THE CASE OF JANE COLE, SPINSTER

It would be difficult to imagine a more clean-shaven, immaculate, and innocent-appearing old gentleman than the one who, of a fine October afternoon, presented himself at the laboratory of T. Ashley, Investigator, with the following singular story:

"My name is Sheaves, sir; Frederick W. Sheaves. I am a lawyer, with offices in the Thorndike Building. About ten days ago one of my clients—an elderly maiden lady—was found dead in her house on Commonwealth Avenue, near Kenmore Station. Dead, sir; crushed, in the basement of her house, where for years she had lived quite alone."

"Crushed?" inquired T. Ashley, with a look of interest.

"Yes, sir. Crushed under the automatic elevator. A fine house, you understand, though much neglected. It has one of those electric elevators. Well, sir, my client was found crushed under the flooring of the elevator, which through some unfortunate and—I must add—rather inexplicable accident or defect in the machinery, had come down on her."

"Accidental death, eh?"

"Yes, sir. The medical examiner pronounced it so."

"Elevator works all right now?"

"Yes, sir. That is the inexplicable part of it. And since the accident, some astonishing developments have taken place—developments which I am asking you to help me explain. I confess, sir, they completely pass all my powers of analysis."

"Indeed?" And T. Ashley smiled, tilting back in his swivel chair. He pressed his finger tips together and with

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interested eyes surveyed Mr. Sheaves, from his bald spot to his silver-rimmed spectacles, thence to his made-up black tie, his old-fashioned black suit, his round cuffs, and his solid gold watch chain. "Here," thought the investigator, "is an old-school type of man rarely met these days. And here bids fair to turn up an interesting case." Aloud he added: "What developments, please?"

"Before I go into them," replied the lawyer, "I must give you at least an outline, sir, of the character and habits of my client. A maiden lady, age seventy-six, a recluse, and—I must state it plainly—a miser. Much given to accumulating and keeping the most incongruous and worthless articles, which she would even pick up in the street and bring home on her very infrequent trips downtown."

"I've heard of such types. Rich, eh?"

"Very well to do, sir. Her fortune, at the time I made her will, last year, was just a trifle over six hundred thousand dollars, most of it in Liberty Bonds. I believe she never kept more than five or ten dollars in cash in the house at any time. She had a most peculiar way of paying her bills—which she let run a long time—by sending out bond coupons. Couldn't seem to part with cash, sir, and would have nothing to do with a checking account. Said she would have no money in bank that wasn't drawing interest. Lived entirely alone with her cat. Devoted to the cat, sir. Extraordinarily so."

"Her name? Your client's name, I mean?"

"Miss Cole. Miss Jane Cole."

"Ah, yes, I remember reading a few lines about her death, in the *Forecast*. Not much publicity about it, was there?"

"Very little. Excellent old family, and all that; last survivor; no heirs—that is, no kin." Mr. Sheaves laid his hat on the desk; T. Ashley reached for a pipe. "She had been dead three or four days, the medical examiner said, when the body was found."

"Who found it?"

"The police, from Station No. 22. The fact that her

groceries and milk had accumulated on the back porch caused the delivery boy to suspect something wrong, and he notified the police. They broke in, discovered the body, and also found lights—electric lights—burning in her library, front hall, and basement. So I imagine the accident must have happened, sir, at night."

"A very reasonable inference. Go on."

"I, as her lawyer, was summoned. From the police I learned how they had found her, crushed flat. Accidentally crushed you understand."

"So you've already said. Now then, she had her groceries and milk left on the back porch, did she?"

"Yes, sir," affirmed Mr. Sheaves. "She had a standing order for just a certain amount of everything, accurately reckoned at the low level of maintaining life, and insisted on it being delivered fresh every day. She never went to the door when the delivery boy came, but took her supplies in at night. I believe her deafness had something to do with her unwillingness to see anybody."

"So she was deaf, eh?" the investigator queried.

"Very, sir. Had to use one of those old-fashioned ear trumpets. From one year's end to another she hardly set foot out of doors except to visit certain banks where she had safe-deposit boxes. She would never hire a taxi, but always used the street cars; and invariably she complained to the conductor about the ten-cent fare in Boston, as against the five-cent fare she had heard of as prevailing in New York."

"A thoroughgoing old miser, wasn't she?" And T. Ashley smiled. "Well, well, very interesting, I'm sure. You say she had a number of safe-deposit boxes?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have a list of those boxes?"

"I have. In fact, I have visited them all. As her executor, so named in her will, I have examined them."

"I suppose everything was in order there. That is, I suppose——"

"Unfortunately, no. And this brings me to the reason

of my call on you, sir. As a matter of fact, the bonds are entirely missing."

"You don't say! What was in the boxes, then?"

"Nothing, sir—nothing but some bundles of old newspapers wrapped with string, and a few old magazines."

"That's odd!" exclaimed the investigator, his eyes beginning to brighten. "Very odd, indeed!"

"More than odd, sir. Most unfortunate! It places me, sir, in a false position. It may even direct the finger of suspicion at me, sir; at me!" The lawyer blinked in mild agitation. "Of course I can't have anything like that!"

"Of course not. Now, her will—what does that provide for?"

"You understand, sir, that as I had the handling of all her property——"

"Of course. We must by all means allay what Villon called 'the envious tongues of malice.' But about the will, now?"

"It leaves everything, house, furniture, and bonds, to the Animal Protection Society."

"Out on Midvale Avenue, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. That big stone building with the——"

"Yes, yes; I know the place."

"I forgot to inform you that on rare occasions she used to visit the office of the society."

"She told those people they were to be her beneficiaries?"

"Yes, sir. They all knew it. Naturally, they are much disappointed by the apparent loss of the bonds. They even have gone so far as to adopt a minatory attitude toward me, and——"

"Of course. That's to be expected," said the investigator. "Peculiar case, all right. Old newspapers and magazines, eh? Carefully stored in safe-deposit boxes. Miss Cole must have been an erratic type."

"I assure you she was, sir. If you knew the trials——"

"Nothing else found at all, eh?"

"Yes, sir; a very little. I am coming to that now. And

this leads me to another of the astonishing developments I mentioned before."

"Let's have it!"

"Three days ago—that was October fourteenth—a man walked into the Banco di Genova, down on Hanover Street, and presented for payment a coupon bearing a number registered as one of Miss Cole's Liberty Bonds."

"You don't say! I suppose you have given a list of the bond numbers to all Boston banks?"

"Yes, sir; and to New York banks, as well, and others. This was facilitated for me by her miserly eccentricity, if I may use the expression, sir. She kept a careful list of her bonds; that list I found among the papers in her desk."

"I see. Who presented the coupon?"

"A fellow named Luigi Maggiore, a dealer in Italian groceries, in North Square. Maggiore is now under arrest, charged with grand larceny. Of course he vehemently protests his innocence of having stolen the bond."

"Naturally!"

"He claims he has never even seen the bond."

"How does he account, then, for having had the coupon?"

Mr. Sheaves laughed, for the first time; but that laugh was mirthless.

"Oh, he tells the most preposterous cock-and-bull story! Especially as it turns out he has practically all the coupons from the same bond."

"You don't say? Well, well! How does this Maggiore explain that?"

"By an obvious lie, sir. He says he gave an Italian street urchin two or three handfuls of chestnuts for the coupons. They were not yet detached, sir, one from the other."

"That's a good one, isn't it? How could an Italian ragamuffin get the coupons from a Liberty Bond owned by an elderly spinster recluse on Commonwealth Avenue? Has this romancing Maggiore any explanation for that?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Mr. Sheaves, his face clouding again. "Maggiore is a shrewd person. Ignorant, but sly.

He has an explanation for everything. His story—I have interviewed him, sir, in Charles Street Jail—runs something like this: He claims that this street Arab, unknown to him and now impossible to locate, on October thirteenth came into his store with what the boy called 'cigar coupons,' and wanted to exchange them for something, anything."

"Very probable, eh?"

"Yet Maggiore sticks to it like iron! He affirms the boy told him he picked up these cigar coupons near the remains of a fire on the refuse pile that disgraces the western side of Muddy Brook, in the Fenway. I have seen the Liberty Bond coupons myself, sir, and I must admit that one edge of the paper is really burned. Very clever ruse of Maggiore's, don't you think, sir?"

"Yes. Primitive, however, like the case of a yegg named 'Jags' Leary, who dropped a packet of stolen bonds on a muddy sidewalk and set his heel on them. When arrested, he set up the plea that he had found them; and—I'm sorry to add—he got away with it. These obvious and barefaced lies are often hard to disprove."

Mr. Sheaves looked worried and said:

"Dear, dear!"

"And just what," inquired T. Ashley, "do you want of me in this case?"

"I want you, naturally, to help me recover the rest of the bonds—some five hundred thousand dollars' worth."

"I thought you said six hundred thousand dollars?"

"The house is assessed at one hundred thousand dollars. That, and the bonds, make up the estate that the Animal Protection Society is going to make trouble for me about. I also want you to help me get this Maggiore convicted."

"My dear sir," disclaimed T. Ashley, blowing smoke, "I'm not a district attorney. I'm merely a private investigator of curious cases that interest or entertain me. If I take this case and succeed in finding the bonds—which is highly problematical—I may discover the thief, and then again I may not. If I do discover the gentleman who was clever enough to abstract those bonds from safe-

deposit boxes and substitute rubbish for them, my services are at the disposal of the proper authorities."

"That is all I ask, sir. That is quite sufficient."

"My fee, however, in this case may be a little high."

"Name it, sir."

"You see, Mr. Sheaves, in some matters where clients are unable to pay, I work for very little; sometimes for nothing at all. In this case, where the beneficiary—if the bonds are found—will be only a cat and dog hospital, I shan't hesitate to charge a good round sum."

"What sum, sir?"

"Ten per cent of any property recovered."

Mr. Sheaves looked relieved.

"That is quite satisfactory to me, sir. As executor, with full powers, I can agree to that, sir."

"All right. Let's just put it in writing and have it witnessed," suggested T. Ashley. "And then, if you don't mind, I'll have a look at the premises of the late Miss Jane Cole."

"Very good," assented the lawyer. "The sooner the better, now!"

"But I warn you," and the investigator smiled, "that you mustn't be surprised at anything that may happen. No telling how these things may turn out. In this case, some rather peculiar developments may occur, unless I miss my guess!"

"So this," said T. Ashley, an hour later, "is where, in classic phraseology, 'the body was found?' "

He gestured through the iron grille toward the oil-blackened concrete floor at the bottom of the elevator well in the now tenantless house.

"Yes, sir," affirmed Mr. Sheaves. "Over in that corner, badly crumpled up and crushed. The elevator, you see, comes down to within about six inches of the concrete. So, even though Miss Cole was very thin and frail, it jammed her fatally."

"I see. And how did they get the body out?"

"Oh, they had to bring a locksmith to open the catch here. It won't open, you understand, unless the elevator

is perfectly level with the place where it's intended to stop. Well, the body had kept it about an inch above the stopping level, so of course——"

"Quite so."

"How it all happened is a complete mystery," Mr. Sheaves continued in an agitated manner. "It is one of several blank mysteries in this case. Why in the world did Miss Cole ever go in under the elevator when it was somewhere up the shaft? And how did she get this shaft door open? And then how did she manage to start the elevator down? As you see, there is no possible way that could happen unless she reached through the grille and pushed the call button. But it would take a much smaller arm than even hers to do that."

"It is puzzling," admitted T. Ashley, scrutinizing the shaft and door by the light of the incandescent over his head. "She certainly couldn't have done it without knowing what she was up to—that is, without meaning to commit suicide. An odd way to kill one's self! It would take a person of monumental nerve to do it this way."

"I hardly think, sir," said the lawyer, "she was the type of woman who would ever commit suicide. From numerous conversations with her, I gathered that she was extraordinarily afraid of death. On several occasions she told me she expected to reach at least a hundred. And even if she had succeeded in starting the elevator down on herself, she could easily have changed her mind, opened this door—you see it releases from the inside—and have walked out."

"Of course. You say you had many conversations with her?"

"Yes, indeed. On—well, naturally, business affairs."

"Where?"

"In her library, upstairs."

"You've used this elevator yourself?"

"Yes, sir. I understand how it works. All the doors, all five floors and the basement, operate in the same manner. That is, I suppose they do, though I've never used it above the second floor, where the library is."

"I see. A common type of automatic elevator. It won't operate unless all the doors are closed and electrically locked. A person outside pushes the call button. A person inside pushes the button in the car corresponding to the floor he wants to stop at. Nothing unusual here."

T. Ashley tried the latch. It lifted.

"The power is off now," explained Mr. Sheaves, "so of course the latches work, even when the elevator is at a different floor."

"Quite so." T. Ashley shoved back the door, entered the well, and looked up at the car, some six feet above. He tried the latch several times; the handle inside and outside of the door worked in unison.

"Old-fashioned kind of handle," he commented. "One of the earlier types, used before the modern kind came in. But that's immaterial. I quite agree with you, Mr. Sheaves, that your client's nerve must have been wonderful to stay here and let the car crush her."

He came out of the well, struck a match, and examined the outer handle with considerable care, till the match burned his fingers.

"Now, then, let's see the upper floors. Maybe there's some better answer to our riddle there. Who knows?"

In the entrance hall of the gloomy old house, overfurnished in dusty, mid-Victorian style, Mr. Sheaves added:

"Oh, by the way, sir, there's one thing I forgot to mention. An umbrella handle was found in the elevator."

"So?" queried the investigator indifferently.

"Yes, sir. Miss Cole must have dropped it there. As I have already informed you, she was given to picking up all kinds of useless odds and ends and bringing them home, when she made one of her infrequent sallies into the outer world. I suppose that umbrella handle may have been something like that."

"Quite likely. Where is it?"

"On the hat rack, there. The police detective looked at it and put it aside as of no moment."

"May I see it, please?"

He examined it a moment, then slid it into his pocket.

"You don't mind if I take this along, eh?"

"Not at all, sir," answered the lawyer, looking puzzled.

T. Ashley now inspected the elevator, opening and closing the door of the grille and then of the car. He paid especial attention to the row of push buttons in the car, numbered thus: "B, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5." He got into the car, scrutinized the door all round, lighting matches now and again.

"This light's pretty bad," said he. "I forgot my electric torch. Can you dig up a candle somewhere?"

"Certainly, sir!"

While Mr. Sheaves was gone, the investigator lighted three or four matches in a bunch, quickly yet effectively looked along the top of the car door, then knelt and inspected the edge of the sill of the well door. But by the time Sheaves had returned from the parlor with a red, fluted candle, T. Ashley was up off his knees again. He thanked Mr. Sheaves for the candle, lighted it, and appeared to continue his investigations.

The lawyer watched him with puzzled, anxious eyes.

"I'm sure, sir," said he, "I don't see what in the world this can have to do with recovering the missing bonds. And they must be recovered, or else I must have a statement from you that you have made a thorough search, as an expert, and that they are irrecoverable."

T. Ashley laughed oddly.

"Nothing is irrecoverable in this world," he answered, "except innocence and youth. I suppose you've already made a careful search of the house?"

"Indeed I have! But—well, I'm baffled. Completely baffled, sir. In my opinion, the bonds were in those safe-deposit boxes, and in some mysterious way——"

"Very likely. Let's have a look round now."

The investigator came out of the elevator, shut both doors, and walked into the parlor. He cast a casual glance around its stuffy, cobwebbed antiquity, then had a look at the unused dining room, gloomy with mahogany and ancestral paneling.

"Didn't eat here, eh?"

"No. Miss Cole lived almost exclusively in the kitchen, and in her library and bedroom."

"Kitchen this way?"

Mr. Sheaves nodded. He followed the investigator down a dark passageway, inspected a disordered kitchen at the right of it, cast a look into a long-disused laundry opposite, and so came to the back door. Of this he opened the spring lock. He shoved the door open and had a glance at the back porch.

"Here is where Miss Cole always had her groceries left," volunteered Mr. Sheaves uneasily, pointing at a table there. "As I've already told you, sir, she had a curious way of never taking them in until night."

T. Ashley laughed again.

"Odd!" he commented. "She must have been a most erratic old person, altogether."

He closed the door, returned to the front hall, and with Mr. Sheaves went upstairs. On the way he asked:

"Sure you've searched the house thoroughly?"

"Rather, sir! I've ransacked it. Even gone so far as to look under all the rugs and behind all the pictures."

"Examined the books in the library?"

"I have, and looked for secret drawers and all that."

"No wall safes or anything of that kind?"

"No, sir. And even if there were, that wouldn't matter. In my opinion, those bonds were stolen from the banks."

"Why did you search the house, then?"

"Oh, on the—well, on the chance that they might be here. And—but what I want you to help me with, Mr. Ashley, is some clew as to how that Italian fellow got hold of those coupons. If you could only get some hint as to that——"

"How do you know," T. Ashley asked with a smile, "but that I already have?"

Mr. Sheaves stared blankly as they came into the upper hall.

"By the way," T. Ashley fired at him, "where's the cat?"

"Oh, the Animal Protection Society took it—starved almost to death—the day Miss Cole's body was found."

"I see. White cat, you said?"

"Oh, no. Black."

"You're familiar with the animal?"

"Why, yes. Casually, that is. But what in the world can the color of that cat have to do with——"

"My dear sir, I didn't say it had anything to do with anything. I was just asking for general information. Ah, library here, eh?"

The lawyer nodded. T. Ashley entered the library, looked all about, and approached a reading table there. He picked up a pair of scissors, studied them, then bent and scrutinized the table top.

"H'm!" he grunted.

"Well?" asked Mr. Sheaves, puzzled.

"Let's have a look at the bedroom now."

He had a look at the bedroom, lasting but two or three minutes, and then said:

"I think now we'll go down into the basement again."

"The basement?" Mr. Sheaves' tone was mystification itself.

"Yes. I've seen enough here."

"But, sir, you've hardly seen anything yet!"

T. Ashley only smiled.

In the basement, he set himself to peering all about. He relighted the red candle, poked in corners, pried behind old boxes, gave a glance even at ash barrels.

"By the way, who kept the old lady's fire in winter? In the furnace, there?"

"Oh, she used to have a man come in every morning."

"Know his name?"

"John Dominick, I think she called him. She was always complaining about having to pay him. She'd have done the work herself if she'd been strong enough, which she wasn't."

"Thoroughgoing old miser, wasn't she? John Dominick, eh? That sounds Italian. Americanization of Giovanni

Domenico, or something of the sort. Know where he lives? Where he is now?"

"Ah, now I—I begin to get a glimmer of light!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Are you hinting that Miss Cole was —ah—murdered? And her body thrown down the elevator well and then——"

"I'm not hinting at anything!" returned the investigator severely. "I never allow myself to hint, or even form a conjecture, till I have all the facts in hand. As yet, I haven't got them. All I want to know, at this minute, is the whereabouts of this John Dominick."

"I think, sir, I can find out for you."

"Do, please, and—ah, what's this now?"

"This" was an umbrella, a headless umbrella, lying a-slant behind a couple of ash barrels. With more show of interest than he had yet shown, T. Ashley routed it out of its resting place and brought it to the light of the incandescent. From his pocket he took the umbrella head and fitted it to the steel rod of the umbrella.

"Like the paper on the wall, to pardon a colloquialism," and he smiled. Then he fell to examining it with minute care. As he came to the ferrule at the tip, his eyes narrowed with increased attention. "H'm!"

"This is all very puzzling to me, sir," put in the lawyer. "I'm sure I don't in the least——"

"Do you mind if I take this most entertaining umbrella along with me, Mr. Sheaves?"

"Not in the least, sir. But I'd really like to know what in the world——"

"Well, let's be going, now. I've seen quite enough."

Mr. Sheaves regarded him with a blank look of amaze.

"I'm sure, sir, I can't comprehend how all this has any bearing on the recovery of those lost bonds!"

"How very fortunate! To be quite frank with you, if everybody saw everything that I see, I'd be out of a perfectly good and enjoyable profession. And that," he added, "would certainly be most regrettable, wouldn't it? Well, Mr. Sheaves, shall we be going now?"

Two days later, the investigator called up Mr. Sheaves at his office in the Thorndike Building.

"Can you meet me in fifteen minutes at Kenmore Station?" asked he.

"Certainly, sir. But tell me—ah—have you any information as to the whereabouts of the——"

"And by the way, Mr. Sheaves, be sure to bring the keys of the house."

"Very well, very well! But," and the lawyer's voice cracked with agitation, "as I was saying, have you——"

"Good-by!" T. Ashley cut him off and started for Kenmore.

The minute he swung off a Brookline car, Mr. Sheaves, already waiting, came toward him with some celerity.

"Tell me!" he exclaimed. "Any news?"

T. Ashley, however, only shook his head.

"I'd rather not talk just yet," he answered. "But we shall see what we shall see."

Once more in the house, they descended immediately to the basement. Here T. Ashley opened the door of the elevator grille and entered the well. He took from his pocket an electric flash, stooped, pointed the white beam of light all over the well floor, then along the little ledge that bordered its slight depression below the floor of the basement.

Two sides of that depression yielded nothing. A glance at the third, however, made the investigator laugh. He knelt, pulled out a couple of loose bricks, and scooped his hand into a large cavity behind them. He groped a moment.

"Not too bad, eh?" he asked, fetching out a packet wrapped in old newspaper and tied with the thin cotton string that Miss Cole had, in her miserly way, saved from grocery parcels.

"What's that, sir?" demanded Mr. Sheaves, all a-tremble, his eyes staring through the silver rims. "The—the bonds?"

"I rather think," replied T. Ashley with some amusement, "we have what all good melodramas call 'the papers.' But let's not be too sure. This package may,

after all, contain nothing but old rags. With an erratic person like the late Miss Cole, one is sure of nothing. Here! Do you mind opening this?"

He handed the bundle to Mr. Sheaves, whose quivering fingers burst the string and unwrapped the newspapers.

"Well—by—by Heavens!" he stammered.

"There we are, safe and sound," said the investigator, coming out of the shaft. "But, very unfortunately, minus the coupons."

"Oh, hang the coupons!" exclaimed the lawyer with a human heat quite unexpected in him. "The vital thing——"

"Of course."

"But how in the name of all that's uncanny," demanded the lawyer, quite pale and trembling, "did you ever locate them there? And how——"

"Oh, it's all quite simple," broke in T. Ashley genially. "I've just been doing a little thinking, that's all."

"Thinking! What kind of thinking?"

"Never mind. Wrap those up, now, and let's carry them over to the Back Bay Trust Company for temporary safe keeping. You and I have a call to make, a rather important call in the way of business, and we don't want to be burdened with any extra impedimenta. Come, let's be going!"

They took a taxi, left the bonds at the trust company, and then once more got into the machine. T. Ashley was pensive, the lawyer all exuberance.

"Midvale Avenue," T. Ashley directed the chauffeur.

All the way out Boylston Street and through the Fenway—past the dump where two or three slow fires smoldered ungraciously on the October air—Mr. Sheaves tried to extract details from the investigator. He, however, only shook his head.

"Wait," he answered. "Time enough for all that later."

"But, sir, I don't understand why we're going out this way at all. My business with the Animal Protection Society can wait till later. We should be headed for the Charles Street jail."

"How so?"

"Why, with the bonds—clipped—in our possession, it ought not to be a very hard matter to make Maggiore talk. We can easily make him tell how he got possession of them, clipped them, and then hid them in that elevator well! A very few minutes would convince him he has nothing to gain by persisting in his stupid denials. If you'll take my advice, sir, we'll turn round and start for Charles Street!"

"And if I took all the advice that's offered me," returned T. Ashley with some asperity, "I shouldn't get far. Please be so very kind, my dear Mr. Sheaves, as to let me handle this matter in my own way!"

Silenced, the lawyer continued to murmur to himself; he probably was the most entirely mystified man in Greater Boston that day.

At the entrance of the Animal Protection Society's building, T. Ashley bade the taxi driver stop.

"Wait for us here," he ordered. "We probably shan't be gone very long." Then, saying no other word, he led Mr. Sheaves up the broad, granolithic steps into the corridor, thence into the office at the right.

He carefully closed the office door behind him and whispered to Mr. Sheaves:

"When I tell you to lock this door, lock it! You understand?"

Amazed, the lawyer stared at him, but nodded assent.

T. Ashley advanced to the desk, behind a solid oaken partition some three feet high. At the desk sat an acidulous-looking lady who might once have been young and plump.

"Good day," he said, with a smile; and when he wanted to smile, there was nothing smoother. "Can you tell me if you have any colored men in your employ here?"

"Colored men? Well, let's see," she answered. "Yes. We have three."

"In what capacities, please?"

"Why, there's—let's see now—Zebulun Harris, our assistant janitor. And Washington Brown. He helps on the ambulance. And then there's Jim."

"Jim who?"

"I don't know. Just Jim, that's all."

"And what does Jim do, please?"

"Oh, he helps round."

"Quite so. May I see them, please?"

"What for?" she demanded, stiffening a little.

"Well, the fact is, my dear young lady," he said softly, "the fact is, confidentially, a sum of money has been bequeathed to all colored employees of charitable institutions in Boston, and I'm distributing it. I won't take much of your employees' time. Will you call them, please?"

The lady who had once been young pushed a button, and a red-haired boy appeared.

"Tell Zeb and Washington and Jim to come here!" she commanded, quite in the grand manner. Not every day was she confidentially informed of the details of a bequest.

Marveling greatly, but keeping near the door he had been told to guard, Mr. Sheaves stared at the investigator. He, however, quite unmoved, walked about the office humming to himself, looking at pictures of cats, dogs, and horses, and with particular attention examining the anatomical chart of a cow.

"Oh, by the way," said he, turning toward the female at the desk, "do you happen to have a black cat for adoption?"

"Why, yes. We've got all kinds of cats. Would you like a black one?"

"If you can spare one."

"Certainly!" Once more she summoned the red-haired boy and bade him fetch a black cat. This specimen turned out to be gaunt and hungry, but open to advances. T. Ashley fondled it a moment, then put it down.

"Thank you," said he. "I'll take it when I go, and I'll give it a good home."

"You're very welcome! Sign this card, here, please?"

He signed the card while the black cat continued to indicate its warm heart by rubbing against his legs. The signing was hardly over when a door—the door of the

red-haired boy, not that which Mr. Sheaves was guarding —opened, and a colored boy of thirteen or fourteen came in.

"Jim," said the female almost sweetly, "this gentleman has called to see you. Mind your manners now, Jim, and don't forget to say thank you!"

"Yo'—yo' want to see me, boss?"

"Yes, Jim. Here's five dollars for you, Jim, left you by a friend you don't know. That's all right, Jim. Don't thank me; thank him. Good-by!"

The negro boy, dazed, pocketed the V and retired in some disorder. Hardly had he gone when a lean, wiry, yellowish man in overalls and jumper came in, followed by a stolid, coal-black one who shambled.

"Which of you two is Zebulun Harris?" asked the investigator.

"Right here, sir," answered the yellowish man, with a side glance at the cat. The man spoke good English, with no trace of dialect.

T. Ashley spoke his little piece again and gave Zebulun five dollars. Zebulun thanked him noncommittally. Washington Brown stammered his gratitude in accents of Virginia.

"Just a minute, now," said the investigator. "Perhaps you may want to know who left you this money. Close that door, please. We don't want anybody else to hear."

Zebulun closed the door through which he and Washington had entered.

"You want to know, both of you?"

"Yes, suh," from Washington. Zebulun only nodded. The presence of the cat, it seemed, by no means gave him pleasure.

"All right! Listen, now!" bade the investigator.

"It's this way," he continued, speaking slowly and in simple words. "There's a man here in Boston who knows all kinds of strange things. He has a kind of second sight. One night he had a wonderful dream. He dreamed he saw the back door of a house where a rich old lady lived. There was a man who knew this lady was rich; he'd

heard about her at the place where he worked. This man who knew she was rich thought she must keep a lot of money in her house, so one night he went there. He went to the back door and waited. He wanted to rob the house —steal the money; that's what the dream man saw in his dream."

T. Ashley paused.

The black cat, purring, rubbed against Zebulun's legs. The negro shifted uneasily; Washington Brown blinked with fascinated apprehension.

"After a while," continued T. Ashley, "the dream man dreamed the old lady opened the door. Then the man who was waiting there watched his chance, and, while she was carrying some groceries into the kitchen, he slipped into a little laundry room near it. He was going to wait there till the old lady was asleep and then rob the house. You both understand the dream, so far?"

"Yes, suh!" affirmed Washington. The other nodded. At the desk, the once-young female listened, puzzled.

"Well, then," went on the investigator, sliding a hand into his pocket, "the dream man dreamed that the robber waited and waited, and after a while he began prowling toward the front part of the house. But as he came near the front hall, the old lady came downstairs and went down into the basement. The robber waited a while longer, but the old lady didn't come back. There was an elevator in the hall. He could peep down the elevator well. He saw the old lady down there, in under the elevator. He knew she was deaf and couldn't hear him, and he had an idea. He tiptoed downstairs and shut the elevator well door on her and put a nail in the catch. He had her in a kind of cage, you see. Understand me? It's all clear. Why, the dream man even dreamed he saw marks on the catch where the nail was jammed in. That's how the robber caught the old lady in a cage, you see."

"Pow'ful funny dream, dat, boss!" ejaculated the black man, sweat beginning to gleam on his forehead. Zebulun, the yellowish one, began sucking at his loose lips, but remained stolid.

"Yes, it is a funny dream," agreed T. Ashley. "And a lot funnier parts are still coming. After the robber had the old lady caged, he told her he wouldn't let her out till she told him where all her money was. She screamed, but it was way down cellar, and nobody heard her, because the dream man dreamed she was seventy-six years old and couldn't make very much noise. She said she didn't have any money, but the robber didn't believe her.

"He went upstairs to look for money. He didn't like that screaming, though, because it might bring somebody. So he got both frightened and mad. He knew how elevators worked, because he'd used them, and he had an idea —a big idea!"

Another pause while Washington Brown mopped perspiration with a handkerchief held in a shaking hand, Zebulun looked surly, and the black cat purred about the feet of T. Ashley.

"This was the big idea: The robber took an umbrella from the rack in the front hall and poked it through the bars of the two doors and pressed the button marked 'B.' He pressed it with the handle of the umbrella. That's what the dream man dreamed."

"Boss!" ejaculated Washington. "'Scuse me, but Ah done got to be goin'. Ah got work to do, an'——"

"Just one little minute," said T. Ashley. "You don't get a chance every day to hear a sure-enough hoodoo dream like this. Not with a black cat in the room, too! The elevator started down. The robber tried to pull the umbrella out, but somehow it stuck, and the top of the elevator cut it right off by pressing it against the sill of the hall floor. It tore that handle right off the steel rod, and the dream man could see marks on the door of the elevator and the sill where the handle had been pulled off. The handle of the umbrella was left inside the car."

"Ah—Ah don't like dat dream nohow!" moaned the black man, his teeth chattering. "Ah done tole you, boss, Ah got to go!"

"You stay here!" commanded T. Ashley, advancing a step. "Judge, lock that door!"

Mr. Sheaves, amazed beyond words, obeyed. T. Ashley, his hand still in his pocket, edged over toward the other door. "And something else happened, too," he continued. "The dream man saw it all in his dream. As the elevator cut off the umbrella, it flipped the end up, and the iron on the end cut a little place in the robber's wrist. And the dreamer saw a little spot of blood on the end of the umbrella!"

"Lawdy, boss!" moaned the black man, rubbing his wrist. "Ah done heard enough o' dat dream! Ah tole you Ah done got to go!"

The yellowish man, casting sullen eyes at the floor, smiled insolently. He swaggered a little where he stood, but he didn't look at the black cat.

"Now," went on T. Ashley implacably, "after the old lady was murdered—crushed to death by the elevator—the robber went down the cellar, still holding the umbrella, to see what he'd done. He had nerve; he wasn't scared much. He figured nobody could ever get anything on him. He pulled the nail out of the elevator door in the cellar and put it in his pocket. Then the dream man saw him throw the umbrella over behind a couple of ash barrels. They were all dusty, but the umbrella wasn't. After that, he went upstairs again to steal, leaving the old lady, murdered, in the cellar!"

"Wha'—wha' for yo' tell me dat, boss?" pleaded the black man. "Ah ain't nebber kill no ole lady, ner no young un! Ah ain't kill nobody! An' Ah tell yo', boss, Ah done got to go now!"

"All right, you can go in just one minute. The robber went upstairs and into the old lady's library. The first thing he saw there was a lot of papers that looked like cigar stamps all in a little heap on the table. He didn't know what they were worth, or anything, but he stuffed them into his pocket. Then he was just going to look for money when he glanced up, and there—there—right in front of him"—T. Ashley pointed at the black cat with a magnificent and melodramatic gesture—"there stood—a black cat!"

The blacker of the negroes gave a shriek and turned toward the door. Yammering, he tried to flee. T. Ashley was before him, between him and the door. At the other door stood "the judge."

The yellowish man's hand snatched from his pocket a blunt-nosed gun. But T. Ashley was quicker.

With a bubbling blasphemy, the yellowish man fired. His shot and the investigator's crashed almost together. But already T. Ashley's bullet had shattered his right wrist. The negro's bullet, wild, shattered the nose from a perfectly good plaster cast of Galen over the window. The blunt gun skittered on the linoleum. Howling, the yellowish man cringed, writhed. The black man, with a whoop of jungle terror, backed against the wall wild-eyed.

A faint shriek from the desk—a flop—announced the swoon of the once-young lady.

"Listen to me, Zebulun," T. Ashley commanded the moaning negro, keeping him covered, "that black cat scared the daylights out of you. You're a smart man, and you've got brains, but you can't stand a black cat at midnight in the house of a woman you've just murdered. You left the lights burning, and you skipped out the back door and away toward this place, through the Fens. There was a fire burning on the dump. You threw those coupons on the fire, but the devil was after you and blew one sheet out again, only charred. And so that's how I happened to dream all this! Get me?"

The yellowish man answered nothing. He could answer nothing. Slumping forward, he collapsed, lay prone and bleeding.

T. Ashley opened the door.

"Get out!"

Washington Brown vanished like a streak of black lightning. The investigator turned to the phone.

"Give me Station No. 22 and be quick about it!" he commanded.

"I can follow most of your chain of deductions," said Mr. Sheaves, after it was all over and they were taxiing downtown again. "But what I fail to understand is how

you knew it was a negro you had to look for. How the devil, sir, did you know that?"

"Very simple blood test, I assure you, made from a smear taken from the ferrule of the umbrella. That established the race of the murderer beyond question. And what negro should know more about Miss Cole than one employed at the Animal Protection Society building, where she had often gone and had been much gossiped about? Simplicity itself! But of course I had to bear in mind the negro psychology. The black cat was a real factor, you see."

"Yes, yes; now I understand. But how did you know where to look for the bonds?"

"Merely by thinking it all out, step by step, for a day or two; by asking myself what possible motive the lady could have had for being where she was. Incidentally, a few slivers of Liberty Bond paper on her desk told me she'd been clipping coupons. It's all quite elementary. And it's all over, too, except for freeing our poor, bewildered friend, Maggiore."

"Not at all!" said Mr. Sheaves. "There's still that ten per cent of the five hundred thousand dollars to be paid you."

"Oh, that," T. Ashley laughed and waved his hand in lordly manner, "*that* is a mere detail!"

FREDERIC F. VAN DE WATER

THE GREAT WET WAY

THERE was a pebble in his mouth, sharp-angled and disturbing. He ejected it through stiffened lips. Then, as it rolled over the chips at his feet, his eyes discovered what his tongue confirmed. It was a tooth that a minute before had been soundly rooted and apparently permanent.

Sergeant Daniel Delaney of Troop H, New York State Troopers, still a little dizzy and more than a little breathless, wiped his bleeding mouth on a gray flannel shirt sleeve and looked from the outcast tooth to something else that lay among the chips about the woodpile. This something, ungainly as an overthrown scarecrow, all at once proclaimed its humanity by opening one eye and reaching for the handle of the chopping-block ax.

"Don't!" Delaney counseled.

Consciousness seemed to flow gradually downward to the feet of the prostrate one. These kicked the chips about and were finally jerked beneath their owner, who rose to his knees. "I can lick you," he insisted, as though continuing an argument, and gripped the ax handle.

Something caught Delaney's heel as he took a step backward. It was his gunbelt. As he buckled it on he spoke again: "Some other time," he proposed, and hitched the .45 Colt into position on his left hip.

The battered, kneeling figure tried to stand. The trooper slipped a hand under the armpit and eased him down upon the chopping block. "Sit there," he advised, "till your head clears. When it does you'll find it's maybe not so hot as it was."

Beyond the corner of the barn Delaney could see a

(From "Horsemen of the Law," by Frederic F. Van de Water. Copyright, 1926, by D. Appleton and Company, New York.)

laden clothesline gesticulating in the wind. Beyond that stood a whitewashed cottage. A woman in a faded calico dress came to the door and emptied a dishpan. She hesitated a minute, gazing at the trooper. Then she retired.

"We'll begin all over," the sergeant informed the man on the chopping block. "Are you George Pascoe? That's settled, then. That your house? Good. I'm Sergeant Delaney of the Troopers. I've a warrant to search that house."

"What fer?" Pascoe demanded.

"Liquor. Liquor you and your gang's been running in from Canada over the Wet Way, Pascoe."

"We ain't," the other replied sullenly, rubbing his bruised ribs with a grimace.

Delaney drew a paper from his hip pocket and unfolded it as he spoke.

"Maybe not. Maybe my information is all wrong and you're using that truck in the barn to take sightseeing parties at night from St. Ignace to Mayburn. Maybe you never heard the highway here called the Great Wet Way. I'm over here to dry it up, Pascoe."

Pascoe looked at him, his unclosed eye gleaming. "Somebody in Arareek's been lying about me again."

"Maybe," Delaney answered.

A whine of self-pity crept into Pascoe's voice. "They keep hounding me," he muttered. "I try to go straight, and a swell chance they give me. Just because a feller slipped once is no reason——"

"Listen," Delaney interrupted, "this booze game is just one double-cross after the other. You know it. If we get your gang on the run, they'll throw you overboard. We'll pinch you sooner or later, anyway, Pascoe. If you licked me, I'd have had to, now—resisting an officer. As it is—we'll forget it."

The grimace contorting Pascoe's face was obviously intended for a smile. "Whoever told you I was runnin' rum lied," he said. "Look for yourself."

They skirted the clothesline and approached the kitchen door. On the step sat a child in a blue jumper, tow-

headed and grave. He lifted wide eyes from the railway train that, to adults, might have seemed nothing but spools arranged in line, and watched the pair advance. "Hello, pop," he hailed. "We think you look funny."

Delaney grinned, and the little boy, after some consideration, smiled back shyly at the man in gray with the black stripes running down his riding breeches into his boots and the big pistol on his thigh.

"Hello," he said. "We like you."

"Hello yourself," Delaney retorted.

"What," the little boy demanded, "happened to my pop?"

The man's battered face reflected a distortion of Delaney's grin.

"Oh, pop's all right," the trooper said. "Pop just happened to bump into something. It's a train you have there, isn't it? All right. Don't run over us."

But as he moved forward the little boy gathered up his spools and ran into the cottage. "Muvver," he called. "Muvver. Here's a sojer!"

She turned from the shelf on which she was arranging the freshly washed dishes as the trooper and Pascoe strode into the kitchen. A plate slipped from her fingers and crashed into bits on the floor.

In her white face her eyes seemed enormous. They were blue, Delaney realized, and the dark hair pulled so straightly back from her forehead would have curled if permitted. The hands that clutched each other on the bosom of the stiff gingham dress were reddened but delicate.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly of Pascoe.

"Police," he answered, shrugging his shoulders. He swayed and clutched at the door jamb.

Instantly she was beside him. "What happened, George? What happened?" she begged like a child.

He shook his head impatiently. "Don't be a fool," he ordered. "Nothing's the matter. Get me a basin and a cloth. I want to wash up."

She obeyed. There was fury in the glance she threw

at Delaney as she crossed the room. To him her silence seemed more eloquent than violent speech. Clumsily he stepped forward to aid her with the basin, but she avoided him.

"I'll go out on the stoop," Pascoe said impersonally to the trooper. "Help yourself."

He retired. The woman stood in the doorway. The child clung to her skirt. There was a moment's silence.

Then Delaney spoke: "I've a warrant to search this house."

There was no mirth in her smile. Twin spots of bright crimson had come to her cheeks. "Well," she challenged, "what is it you expect to find?"

"Liquor," he answered, looking from her to the child clutching her skirt. "And," he added involuntarily, "I hope I don't."

"There's never been a drop of liquor in this house," she said quietly, and he believed her.

"Or in the truck yonder in the barn either?" he queried.

She did not respond for a moment. One hand strayed from her bosom to rest on the tow head of the child clutching her skirt. "Why can't you leave him alone?" she asked bitterly.

"I've my duty to do," Delaney responded, and instantly hated his words.

"And beating him up is part of it," she flared. "You with a gun in your belt and the law behind you! Because —because he did a term in Sing Sing, you police'll hound him the rest of his days. I know you and your duty."

The sergeant hurried through his task almost shamefacedly. When he emerged from the cellar, still empty-handed, she stood on the kitchen stoop. She met his gaze with bleak, hostile eyes.

"That's over," he said with specious cheerfulness. "Where's Pascoe?"

"In the barn," she replied with no trace of emotion in her voice. "Leave him alone. You've done enough for to-day."

Her voice stung. For the first time since he had seen her, words came easily.

"This is no more pleasant for me than it is for you," he retorted. "I'm going now, and if you'll keep your husband from making night trips across the border with that truck of his, I'll not have to come again. I'm not here to hound him. I never knew he'd been in prison till you told me. And whatever beating up he got this morning, he asked for. More'n that, he ordered it. He thought he could lick me. He was from Missouri."

His grin was infectious. She caught herself on the verge of a smile.

"And another thing, I'm a trooper, not a policeman. When I'm certain your husband isn't rum running. I'll leave you alone, whether he was raised in Sing Sing or in the Y. M. C. A."

"I'm not at all interested," she said coldly.

"You are too," he contradicted. "You're awful interested in making me out a thick-necked, fat-headed cop."

This time she did smile. Delaney was astonished to find it left him slightly breathless.

"I'm from Missouri too," she informed him.

"I wish I was certain you weren't from the Great Wet Way," he countered.

She flushed. "That's because he was in prison," she said impersonally.

"Then what does he use his truck for?" Delaney demanded.

She started to speak, and then checked herself. "Ask him."

"I did once this morning. I'll ask him again. Good-by, son."

He dropped his hat like a candle snuffer over the head of the child, who pushed it off and grinned.

"What's your name," Delaney demanded.

"Wum," the little boy answered.

"He means William," the woman interpreted. "Do you want some plaster for that cut on your face?"

"That's kind of you," Delaney said, "but I'll go talk to your husband again, then go back to the village for repairs."

John Tarleton, Delaney's patrol mate, was tinkering with the side-car motorcycle in the yard of the Mansion House when the sergeant returned. A lean, dark-faced man sat on a box near by. "Find anything?" Tarleton demanded, looking up from the machine.

"Nothing," the sergeant replied.

"For Gawd's sake," the corporal asked, "were you digging for it with your face?"

"We had a little trouble," Delaney answered.

The dark man showed his teeth in a flashing smile, utterly devoid of mirth. "This Pascoe," he said, with the faintest trace of accent in his voice, "he is a bad man. What?"

"That's what you said," the sergeant retorted.

"You arrested him?" the other persisted.

"No."

"Ah, you police. You let him get away, then?"

"Look here, Latour," Delaney said bluntly, "suppose you come clean. If you're as anxious to help as you say you are, tell us all you know."

Latour shrugged his shoulders and canted his head to one side. "I wish to see no one in jail," he disclaimed uneasily.

"Huh," the sergeant replied, staring at him. "Well, it'll comfort you, then, to know we haven't a thing on Pascoe. He's been in prison, but he says he's going straight now. He's got a jolly little kid, and his wife——"

"His what?" Latour interrupted.

"His wife," Delaney answered and stared again until the other's gaze wandered. "And she's a darn fine woman," he added with significant emphasis on each word.

Latour tapped a cigarette on a thumbnail, shot an estimating glance at Delaney, and appeared to ponder on something amusing. "I have nothing against Pascoe or his wife," he said finally, with the barest hesitation be-

tween the last two words, "except what I have already told you."

"You've told us nothing," Delaney pointed out bluntly. "You've only hinted that we better keep an eye on Pascoe."

"I think so," the other replied, exhaling a blast of smoke; "you don't, sergeant. He beats you up, but you let him go, eh! His wife is, as you say, a charming woman."

"Where are you going?" Delaney queried as Latour started away.

"That is my business," the other retorted over his shoulder. "Do you want to arrest me? I have no pretty —wife."

Delaney took one step in pursuit and then checked himself. Tarleton jammed down a pedal of the machine over which he struggled. The engine had a peroxysm of uneven coughing, then strangled and expired.

"I'd swap eight of these things for one troop horse," Tarleton lamented. "What did you really find, Dan, besides a reconstructed face?"

"Little enough. Pascoe says he works for a Shaftsbury firm. Its name, as near as I can gather, is None of Your Damn Business. He has a delusion he can lick troopers. There's not a drop of liquor on the place."

"There's something funny about this guy Latour," Tarleton offered. "People here say that he and Pascoe are friendly. I can't quite make it. He's a slippery guy. Maybe he was lying."

"It looked like a double-cross to me," Delaney reflected. "But I'll bet," he added after a pause, "that his wife doesn't know a thing about it."

Save to certain complacent and compensated county and township officials who waxed fat by refusing to kick, the Wet Way Gang was known solely by its works. These came southward by night in truckloads of cases.

Constables, hearing the trucks thunder through their bailiwicks, chuckled and thought of dividends to come. Revenue agents either cursed or smiled up their sleeves,

depending upon the degree of their honesty. The Wet Way was "fixed."

Yet the enterprise eventually became too large to remain hidden. Complaints began to seep into the headquarters of the New York State Troopers, the mounted rural police of New York.

"Stop it," was the burden of the communication forwarded through official channels from Albany to the barracks of Troop H.

"Stop it," was the substance of the instruction I delivered by Captain Dover, the "C. O." to Sergeant Daniel Delaney and Corporal John Tarleton.

Immediately thereafter trouble began along the St. Ignace-Mayburn Highway. The thoroughfare the gang had come to consider its own private property was invaded by two men in gray whom New Yorkers knew it was hard to evade, more difficult to awe by threats, and impossible to corrupt. The Wet Way Gang paid the pair the compliment of extreme caution. No liquor came through Delaney's and Tarleton's territory. Vigilance and investigation brought them no clew until the swarthy Latour had muttered statements that were insinuations rather than information.

Under the deft hands of Trooper Tarleton, the motorcycle came out of its sulks and burst into cadenced song. The trooper chuckled, and after working the throttle back and forth, shut down the engine and turned to the renovated sergeant, who approached from the hotel, his uniform normal, his face more nearly so.

"Any mail for me?" he queried, noting the envelopes in Delaney's hands.

"Express check from the captain." Delaney replied, "and a note saying he hopes we're enjoying our vacation."

"Sarcastic, eh?" Tarleton commented.

"Uh-huh," Delaney agreed. "Points out we've been a week on this case and haven't made an arrest. Wants to know how come."

"Well," Tarleton spluttered, "if any one expects that two of us can clean up a situation that all the constables

and enforcement agents in northern New York have quit on——"

"Yeh, Jack," the sergeant interrupted quietly, "that's just what every one does expect—including the captain and you and me. Letter says furthermore that Ellis and Hume have been pulled in off patrol and stationed in Shaftsbury to cooperate with us. I tell you what you'd better do. Straddle that mill and ride down to Shaftsbury. Tip off Ellis and Hume concerning our line on Pascoe. Maybe they'll know who he's working for—if any—there. Tell 'em I'd like them to find out, if possible."

"Right," Tarleton nodded.

"I want to see this Latour again, anyway," Delaney reflected, touching his face with tender fingers. "I'll try and throw the fear of God into him. He knows more than he'll admit, I think."

A dust cloud rose behind the departing Tarleton and blotted him out. Delaney watched it absently.

"I'll bet she doesn't know anything about it," he muttered.

Latour had checked out when he returned to the hotel. That was all the information that Delaney could glean from his host, over and above the statement that the man came to Arareek frequently and was probably "a salesman or something." Inquiry about the village brought no further enlightenment concerning Latour or his wares. He had been twice or thrice in company of Pascoe. That was all the villagers knew, or cared to tell. Communities along the Great Wet Way had learned that silence was frequently actually golden.

Delaney sat on the steps of the Mansion House when the clatter of the motorcycle, returning through the dusk, came to his ears. He shook his head and rose. "You're a darn fool," he told himself for perhaps the tenth time since Tarleton had departed.

The cycle trundled up to the curb, and Tarleton dismounted stiffly. He shrugged his shoulders in response to the sergeant's query.

"Nothing, so far," he replied. "Ellis and Hume and I

have been gumshoeing around trying to find some one in Shaftsbury who knows Pascoe. I had my trip for nothing —except what I saw coming up the hill just now: that Pascoe's truck has gone. The barn door was open and the barn was empty. I rode a little way up the lane to make sure."

"Hum," Delaney answered. He paused a moment and then rose from the step. "Go in and get your supper," he directed. "I'll ride down to the Pascoe house and—and look around."

The barn was empty, as Tarleton had said. Delaney, who had left the motorcycle at the entrance to the lane, stepped into the building's deeper blackness from the thickening gray of the twilight. The reek of burned gasoline told him that Pascoe had left only recently.

Yellow light filtered through the thin white curtain hung in the kitchen window of the cottage. Delaney took an irresolute step toward it and then paused to listen.

"The kid's crying," he muttered. "Maybe something's the matter." He readjusted his tie and hitched up his belt. "The less you see of her, the easier it'll be for you. Danny, my boy," he muttered and took another step toward the house. He smiled a little wryly at the way his heart was thumping.

The little boy's wailing scaled up into a scream. A woman's voice cried out once and was suddenly silenced. Delaney ran toward the cottage.

The kitchen door slammed back against the wall with the violence of his entry. For a fraction of a second he blinked in the sudden light. Then he met her eyes. A strand of dark hair straggled across them, masking their terror. The lower half of her face was hidden by the bulk of a man's shoulder. He had pinned one of her bare arms against her side. The other was thrust against his bending head, pushing it away. She had been forced back against the door of the bedroom, behind which the little boy shrieked his terror.

Latour turned his head at the bang of the door. The mocking smile he wore gave place to a scowl as he met

Delaney's gaze. He released the woman and swung about to confront the sergeant.

"Well?" he challenged.

Delaney, white face twitching, stepped forward and then checked himself. He looked from the man to the disheveled woman, who leaned against the door, gasping.

"Did you call?" he queried gently.

One trembling hand pushed the dark hair out of her eyes.

"I think I did," she whispered. There was a second of silence. "Thank you," she added.

Latour looked from the sergeant to the woman, and his teeth shone in a feral grin. The child in the other room still wept. Delaney read the appeal in the woman's face.

"All right," he said aloud, and she slipped through the door.

The two men faced each other in silence. Then Latour lifted his shoulders in a Gallic shrug.

"Two is company," he said, and moved toward the outer door.

"Two is all that's here," Delaney retorted. "Stand still till she comes back."

There was uneasiness in the man's face as he shrugged again. The cries from the other room ceased. A moment later the woman returned. She had smoothed her hair hastily, and a pin had replaced the button torn from her dress.

"Who is that?" Delaney asked, nodding toward the stranger as if he had been a piece of furniture.

She hesitated, biting her lip. A faint mocking smile curved the other man's mouth.

"A friend of George's," she said huskily at length.

"You complain against him?" Delaney asked automatically.

Again she paused. Her hands clenched so that the knuckles gleamed white. Then she shook her head. Delaney started to speak. The broadening smile on the other man's face checked him.

"As you please," he said. "Do you want him to leave?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Get out," Delaney ordered quietly and distinctly, stepping aside from the doorway. As the man started to obey, the grin on the dark face drove the sergeant to speech. "You're a sweet friend," he snarled, "for a man to trust alone with his wife."

The woman's eyes widened. Latour shrugged again.

"Wife?" he said. "She ain't George's wife. She's his——"

Delaney struck him across the mouth. He reeled and clutched the table to keep from falling. A bright thread of blood coursed down his chin. The sergeant's hand had dropped to his revolver butt.

"Get out," he whispered, his eyes dark slits in a chalky face.

The other obeyed without a word. His footsteps sounded on the steps and swished away through the grass into silence.

After a moment the woman spoke.

"Thank you," she said in a stifled voice.

He forced himself to grin. "Youngster all right?"

She nodded.

"Where's Pascoe?"

His dry official manner drove the smile from her face.

"You keep persecuting him," she exclaimed passionately. "First, Emile; than you!"

She forestalled his question.

"Yes," she continued. "Emile Latour is his name. He has some hold on George. He comes here often. They may have been in—in prison together. He came this evening and talked to George just before he left."

"Where did he go?" Delaney persisted.

"To Shaftsbury," she replied calmly. "He does moving jobs for a man there."

"Who's the man?" the sergeant asked.

"John Sylvester," she answered with a touch of defiance.

"Perhaps," he said, watching her narrowly, "he went over the border on this job."

She did not pretend to misunderstand him.

"After liquor," she supplemented. "I know that's what you believe in spite of all I've told you. It's not true. George is going straight unless men like Emile and you——"

He drove his point home relentlessly. "Then you wouldn't mind if I phoned the substation at Shaftsbury, telling them to look out for Pascoe and search his truck?"

"There's the telephone," she replied, nodding to the instrument in the corner.

She listened calmly while he talked to Trooper Hume, ordering him to find Pascoe and also to talk to John Sylvester. There was scorn in her face when he had concluded. It drove him to say: "If I've been mistaken, I'll apologize to him and you. It's not a pleasant job for me. You may not believe it, but it's so."

He felt himself reddening under the grave dark eyes. He repressed other things that he longed to say—mad, daring things—and only added after a pause: "It's pretty tough on you."

Her lips quivered at this hint of sympathy. She lowered her head that he might not see the tears. "If it weren't for William," she said at length, her small reddened hands chafing each other desperately, "I couldn't stand it. Sometimes I think it was easier when we were alone and George was—away. Yet we're all he has in the world, and the world's a hard place for a man who's been in prison.

"It'll be better later," she went on courageously. "We're saving every cent we can. In a little while now, if George can keep his job, we'll have saved enough to go west and buy a farm where George won't be known and William can grow up decently. I guess this is the worst time we'll ever have."

"It's tough," he muttered again.

She stood so close to him that he could have laid his hands on her slender shoulders. He could smell the harsh, clean odor of her hair. There were tears on her cheeks when she spoke again: "You're kind. There's one

thing I want to tell you. I don't want you to misunderstand. You hit Emile because, because he said——"

He checked her. An instinct keen as self-preservation made his tone light and careless.

"Please. It's none of my business. Bootleggers are my only interest at present. Let it go at that. If there's nothing more I can do for you, Mrs. Pascoe, I'll go back to looking for rum runners."

Something strangely like amusement gleamed in her eyes at the emphasis he laid upon the title. It vanished as he bowed stiffly, picked up the gray felt hat with its purple cord, and started toward the door.

"Be careful," she said anxiously. "Look out for Emile. He doesn't forget."

"I hope he doesn't," he answered, laying his hand upon the knob.

"Good night." As he spoke she clutched him savagely, throwing him off balance.

"Careful!" she almost screamed as he staggered.

Something came whirling in, batlike, from the darkness, flashed golden an instant in the lamplight and sank with a thud into a panel of the door. Outside a curse echoed Delaney's exclamation. There was a patter of feet in haste—then silence.

A knife stuck in the door, its single broad blade half buried in the wood. Its handle still trembled angrily. Delaney wrenched the weapon free.

"Latour's?" he queried. The woman turned away abruptly.

"There was some one outside," she whispered at length. "I didn't see who."

He hesitated, eyes narrow, turning the stubby little dagger over and over in his hands.

"It's a prophetess you are," he said at length. "Have you a gun in the house? Or would you rather I stayed?"

"There's a gun," she said in a muffled voice. "Please go."

He slipped the knife into his pocket.

"I'll not be forgetting that I owe you my life," he

ventured. "Not that it wasn't yours for the asking, even before you saved it," he added with sudden vehemence and closed the door behind him.

Tarleton sat at the table in their room, making out the day's report, when Delaney entered.

"Ellis just phoned," the trooper announced. "Said you'd asked them to look up something."

"Well?" the sergeant prompted irritably.

"All he said," Tarleton pursued, folding up the completed form, "was that there wasn't anybody in Shaftsbury named Sylvester and that Pascoe hadn't showed there?"

"No John Sylvester?" Delaney queried mechanically.

"Not any sort of Sylvester," Tarleton replied with a yawn.

The sergeant stood for a moment, frowning at the opposite wall.

"Get to bed, Jack," he said at length. "Ellis and Hume are patrolling the highway to-night. We can get a few hours' sleep for a change."

Tarleton had been gone an hour the following morning when Delaney was called to the hotel telephone. It was Captain Dover who spoke, his voice level and official.

"Anything to report, sergeant?"

"No arrests, sir. Ellis and Hume patrolled all last night. Tarleton has gone north on a clue this morning. There's nothing coming through, I'm certain."

"I'm informed," the captain said, still impersonally, "that two trucks of liquor went through your district last night, and another is coming through to-night."

"That's not true," Delaney replied bluntly.

"It may not be," the level voice admitted. "It's a tip we got by telephone this morning. The call came from Arareek. It sounds to me like a squeal, sergeant. The man wouldn't give his name. He said that the trucks are being routed over the highway as far as Rumford. Then they take a dirt road that winds back through the hills and joins the highway again just below Shaftsbury. My information is that the gang is swinging wide

around our patrols. I'm told that Pascoe's truck went north last night. Is that so?"

"Pascoe left last night," Delaney admitted. "Tarleton is trying to get track of him."

"This man who telephoned," Dover went on, "said that Pascoe would go over the detour with a load of liquor some time between eight and ten to-night. It looks like a double-cross, sergeant. He also that that you were more interested in a woman in Pascoe's family than you are in catching bootleggers."

There was a moment's pause. Then Delaney found his voice:

"This man who telephoned the captain—did he speak with a little accent? Something like a Frenchman?"

"You know him, then?" Dover queried.

"I think his name is Emile Latour," Delaney replied grimly. "If he's in Arareek, I'll get hold of him."

"He says you spent last evening at the Pascoe home," the captain pursued.

"Then I know it's Latour!" Delaney exclaimed, and sketched the happenings of the previous night. He fancied he could detect relief in his commander's voice as he replied: "That explains a lot, sergeant. Latour is jealous and has double-crossed his partner."

"It sounds that way," Delaney admitted unwillingly. "I'll try and find him. Also I'll patrol that detour to-night myself. Unless," he added gruffly, "the captain would rather assign some one else."

"When I feel that way, sergeant, I'll ask for your resignation." Dover replied.

By noon Delaney had satisfied himself that Emile Latour was not in the shabby country town. He was returning to the hotel, when a hand tugged at the skirt of his uniform coat and he looked down into the grave face of Pascoe's son.

"Good morning," the little boy said.

Delaney replied. The child clung to his hand until another voice behind the pair spoke: "Come, William."

The smile vanished from the trooper's face as he turned to meet the eyes of the girl.

"Good morning," he said stiffly and awkwardly. "Everything all right?"

"Yes," she said, with a smile that made him catch his breath. "Thanks to you."

He strove to remain aloof and impersonal.

"Not at all," he answered mechanically. "Pascoe home yet?"

"He telephoned this morning," she replied. "He said he was busy with a heavy load and wouldn't be home until to-morrow morning."

"For Mr. Sylvester?" he said.

"Yes," she replied gravely, "he was in Shaftsbury when he telephoned, he said."

A trace of warmth crept into her voice. Her eyes were wistful. "Why won't you stop suspecting him?" she asked. "Your own men must have proved I'm telling you the truth."

He did not reply, but caught up the little boy and swung him high into the air so that he screamed with delight.

"There we are," he said, lowering him to the pavement. "Now turn me loose, Wum. I've got to go."

He met the woman's gaze with a troubled face.

"What's the matter?" she asked instinctively.

"Nothing—only I'd like to have you think well of me. I wish I might prove that I meant what I said last night."

He gave her no chance to respond, but walked away. The little boy tugged at her dress.

"We like that man," he said solemnly.

She ran her fingers through his yellow hair. "Yes, honey. We do," she whispered, half to herself.

A dusty and disillusioned Tarleton hobbled stiffly from his motorcycle to the porch of the hotel late that afternoon.

"Find him?" he repeated. "Not a sign. He evaporated. I've ridden a hundred and sixty miles to-day and haven't

picked up his trail anywhere. I'll bet he went south, Dan."

"No," Delaney replied grimly. "Ellis and Hume would have seen him. Is that mill running all right, Jack? Gas and oil aboard? Get your supper then. I'm going hunting on her. No. This is a solo job. I'll be in later."

It was still daylight when, just outside the village of Rumford, he turned into the dirt road branching off from the main highway. He bounced for a mile or more through thick dust and over deep ruts, watching the road before him carefully. At length he found what he sought. In a depression lay a drying mud puddle. Its bank had retained what the powder of the drier stretches of road had not—deep welts cut by the treads of heavy tires.

"Trucks!" Delaney whispered to himself. There was no exultation in his exclamation.

A little farther along, at the crest of a slope, he drove his cycle into the underbrush at the side of the road, dismounted, and sat watching the dusk crawl up through the valley below him.

"Maybe," he said aloud, "maybe she doesn't know anything about it."

He tugged his holster into easy reach and then squatted silent, half obscured by the bushes, waiting. Mosquitoes tortured him. They were more bearable than his thoughts. Once or twice he swore softly. Minutes marched past into hours. Then, all at once, he checked even his breathing to listen.

From far away came a faint humming, and he caught the low growl of shifting gears. Now, mingled with the roar of the engine, he could distinguish the complaint of jolting springs. Still he could see nothing. He rose cautiously and waited, his gun in one hand, his flashlight in the other. All at once a rising bulk blotted out a low hanging star, and a second later the dark outline of a truck, heaving up the hill, was blocked against the sky. It was running without lights.

The white circle of his flash struck the hood, rebounded

to the figure crouched behind the wheel, and held him in a frame of radiance. Delaney saw the man shrink and recognized him. As the truck drew abreast, the trooper swung himself on to the step and thrust his gun into the driver's ribs.

"Stop!" he shouted above the clamor of the engine. George Pascoe obeyed. The truck groaned and grated and then stood still. For a second after the engine died neither man stirred. Then the trooper, slipping a practiced hand about the man's hips, drew out a revolver and tucked it into his own pocket.

"Put your hands up, Pascoe," he advised. "What have you got aboard? You'll save me the trouble of looking by talking."

"Scotch," the other replied with a faint attempt at bravado.

"I knew it all the time," Delaney said, half to himself. His voice held only immense depression.

"It was your friend Latour who tipped us off," he added, almost viciously. "He double-crossed you, Pascoe, after trying to take your wife away from you."

"My wife?" Pascoe muttered uncomprehendingly.

"Yes," Delaney pursued bitterly. "She saved my life last night. You have the easiest part in this mess, at that. This is the way I'll have to repay her—and you, with a prison record already!"

"My—my wife," the other repeated in a puzzled tone. "I mean," he added, "Latour didn't harm her?"

"No," the trooper replied, shrugging hopelessly. "She's all right. I saw her on the street to-day. She said you were in Shaftsbury, doing some moving job. This is going to be a sweet thing for her and the kid unless she knows about your game already."

Pascoe blinked in the glare of the flash. At Delaney's order he switched on the truck's lights. Then he looked narrowly at the trooper and, after a minute's silence, spoke: "This here's the end of me," he said with a travesty of amusement. "Like you say, God knows what will become of her and the kid."

"It'll be easier on her and on you," Delaney reflected, "if you'll come clean. If you'll give us your dope on this Wet Way Gang, if you'll help us round them up, you may get off."

"I can't," Pascoe said slowly. "I don't belong to no gang. This was my own game—mine and Latour's, the double-crossing devil! I had to have the money. This is the end of me—and of her, God help her."

Again he shot a quick glance at the trooper. Then he went on: "We've got every cent I have on this load. If it had gone through, we could have pulled up and cleaned out afterward."

"She said you were going to move west," Delaney said mechanically.

"Did she tell you why?" the other queried.

The trooper shook his head.

"Because," Pascoe said with a catch in his voice—"because she's dyin' in this climate. She's—she's got the con, sergeant. She's got to go to some place like Arizona where it's high and dry, or she'll pass out. Doctor says so. That's why I'm in this mess. We figured it was her only chance."

"She knows about your rum running?" Delaney asked.

"I had to tell her," Pascoe replied. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"She wouldn't of stood for it," he went on. "But she's been frightened over what would happen to the little kid if she was to go. That's why, I guess, she let me go ahead. Well, it's all over with all of us now. If I ever meet Latour——"

He swore while Delaney stared steadily before him along the white path the truck headlights cut through the darkness. He did not see the silvered foliage of the ruts and stones thrown into high relief. Instead, it was the pale, almost haggard face of a girl that he looked upon, and the butt of a knife, quivering in a door.

"So," Pascoe went on drearily, "when this Latour came round, just after the doctor said she'd have to leave if she wanted to live, and showed us how we could get the

money to save her, I went in with him. It looked like the way out. Oh, well——"

He paused. Delaney appeared not to have heard him. He still gazed ahead, along the bright pathway of the light. The engine radiator bubbled faintly. There was no other sound.

"All right," said Delaney at last. "You've licked me." Then, very deliberately, he stepped down from the truck. "I never saw you," he added quietly. "Go along!"

The man at the wheel gasped. "My God, sergeant, you don't mean you're giving me——"

"Oh, get out of here!" Delaney shouted.

The engine roared; the gears grated and caught. The truck lurched forward, hung for an instant on the crest of the rise, and vanished.

Delaney stood, listening to the diminishing clamor. He dropped his pistol back into its holster, and his hand crept unconsciously to the badge on his chest. "You're not through," he said aloud, "but I am."

Before he remounted his cycle he pulled a stout-bladed knife from his pocket and flung it into the dark woods.

He had meant to ride on to the hotel, but all at once the lamp in the window of her home called out to him urgently through the darkness, and before he wholly realized what he was doing he was bumping along up the narrow lane.

Even when he stood before her, he was not quite certain why he had come. He saw the alarm on her face give place to welcome and then return again.

"I just stopped," he found himself saying at length,, "to tell you good-by."

She repeated the word falteringly, inquiringly.

"I've just seen your husband," he said, and when she gave no sign of alarm, went on: "Yes, it's good-by. You're going west and I'm going out of the service."

"Leaving?" she queried. "Why?"

"I just told you," he reiterated, "that I'd seen your husband. I didn't arrest him. That's why."

Her lips tightened. "I'm not good at riddles," she said slowly.

Her coolness brought a flicker of anger into Delaney's eyes. "I'll try to make it plainer," he recited. "You saved my life last night. To-night I found your husband working to save your life. To pay off part of the debt, anyway, I let him go. That's why I'm resigning from the service within the hour."

Her voice echoed the sharpness of his: "One of us, I think, is crazy. Whatever are you talking about? Why shouldn't you have let George go?"

"Because," Delaney returned, speaking with great distinctness, "he was carrying a load of bootleg liquor. Because he's a rum runner. Because you lied to me, knowing all the time what he was. Because I caught him red-handed."

She sat down, not taking her dark eyes from his face. "And you let him go? You say you let him go——"

He was angry now. The perfection of her assumption of innocence challenged and infuriated him. "You needn't act any more," he told her. "I've talked to your husband, I say. I know the whole story. I know you're dying from tuberculosis, if you stay here—if that's not another of the lies you two tell so well. I know he's working to get enough money to take you away."

"Where did you see George?" she persisted in the voice of a child who refuses to be frightened.

"On the loop road that runs through Ryecroft, with a truckful of liquor at his back. It was there he told me this story and I broke my enlistment oath and let him go on south with the load. He'll be past Shaftsbury within the hour. From there the run is clear to the south. He should be back here with his profits by the time I've faced the captain.

"There are troopers in Shaftsbury," she mused.

"Yes," he replied, "but they'll be off duty to-night. This was Tarleton's and my turn to patrol."

There was incredulity in her face. Both her small hands

were pressed against her breast. "And you let him go because I saved your life, you say?"

"I haven't saved your life in turn," said Sergeant Daniel Delaney with strange dignity, "but I've given you the chance to get well of your illness, and I've broken my own life for your sake. It's as much as I can do."

She was on her feet and stood before him, her eyes gleaming, her face white and exalted. "I believe you," she cried.

A moment later he was stumbling blindly through the darkness toward his motorcycle. He heard her call his name, but he did not turn. There should have been shame in his heart that he had held another man's wife in his arms, and kissed her lips. Yet all that he could think about was the warm pressure of her arms about his neck.

It was not until he had reëntered the hotel that bitterness returned to him. He caught sight of himself in the bedroom mirror—the gray hat with the purple cord, the gray shirt with the purple tie; the close-fitting gray blouse with the chevrons on the sleeves. He was about to take all these off forever. If he did not of his own accord, they would be stripped from him.

Tarleton was not in the bedroom and Sergeant Delaney sat down at the table to complete his ritual of sacrifice. What he wrote was brief:

"I hereby resign my warrant as Sergeant of Troop H, New York State Troopers——"

He paused for a moment and then added firmly: "For the good of the service. The same to take place immediately." He signed his name. Then he sat and stared moodily at the paper in front of him. Once he made as if to tear it up, but stayed his hand. "I'm through," he muttered. "Through."

A sleepy voice at his door informed him that he was wanted on the telephone downstairs. Ellis hailed him when he took up the receiver.

"Hello, sarge," he clamored joyously, "we got him and his little old booze truck?"

"Got who?" Delaney demanded.

"Oh, don't be so formal," the irreverent Ellis replied. "Troopers Ellis and Hume beg to inform Sergeant Daniel Delaney that, pursuant to his directions relayed by Miss Mary Ryan, they have succeeded in capturing one George Pascoe, brother-in-law of the aforementioned Miss Ryan and driver of a truck loaded to the muzzle with hooch. That better?"

"Who's Miss Ryan?" Delaney demanded dazedly.

"What you doin'—tryin' to kid me," Ellis demanded, "or did that spill crack your bean? Mary Ryan's the girl who lives with Pascoe and takes care of his kid. She's his sister-in-law. She called up half an hour ago and said you'd been chasin' Pascoe's booze truck and had fallen off your motorcycle and hurt yourself. She said the truck was coming south along Ryecroft loop and you wanted us to beat it out and nail it. So it was, and we did. Hume's arraigning Pascoe now."

"This—this woman that lives with Pascoe did all this?" Delaney gasped.

"Sure." Ellis's voice was more concerned. "Listen sarge; don't try and get it to-night. Go lie down. I'll bet you're shaken up more than you think. See you in the morning."

"Just a minute. You say this Miss Ryan isn't his wife."

"I've told you twice she's his sister-in-law," Ellis replied patiently. "Good-looking kid. I used to know her. Comes from my home town. Pascoe's wife died while he was in the coop, and she's looked after the kid ever since. When you get a chance you better thank her for the job she did to-night. Have you two been working the case together or—Hello, hello!"

But though Ellis worked the receiver hook patiently, no voice responded. All he heard was a far-away bang —like the sound of a door slammed hastily.

E. W. HORNUNG

A COSTUME PIECE

LONDON was just then talking of one whose name is already a name and nothing more. Reuben Rosenthall had made his millions on the diamond fields of South Africa, and had come home to enjoy them according to his lights; how he went to work will scarcely be forgotten by any reader of the halfpenny evening papers, which revelled in endless anecdotes of his original indigence and present prodigality, varied with interesting particulars of the extraordinary establishment which the millionaire set up in St. John's Wood. Here he kept a retinue of Kaffirs, who were literally his slaves; and hence he would sally with enormous diamonds in his shirt and on his finger, in the convoy of a prize-fighter of heinous repute, who was not, however, by any means the worst element in the Rosenthall *menage*. So said common gossip; but the fact was sufficiently established by the interference of the police on at least one occasion, followed by certain magisterial proceedings which were reported with justifiable gusto and huge headlines in the newspapers aforesaid. And this was all one knew of Reuben Rosenthall up to the time when the Old Bohemian Club, having fallen on evil days, found it worth its while to organize a great dinner in honour of so wealthy an exponent of the club's principles. I was not at the banquet myself, but a member took Raffles, who told me all about it that very night.

"Most extraordinary show I ever went to in my life," said he. "As for the man himself—well, I was prepared

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for something grotesque, but the fellow fairly took my breath away. To begin with, he's the most astounding brute to look at, well over six feet, with a chest like a barrel and a great hook-nose, and the reddest hair and whiskers you ever saw. Drank like a fire-engine, but only got drunk enough to make us a speech that I wouldn't have missed for ten pounds. I'm only sorry you weren't there too, Bunny, old chap."

I began to be sorry myself, for Raffles was anything but an excitable person, and never had I seen him so excited before. Had he been following Rosenthall's example? His coming to my rooms at midnight, merely to tell me about his dinner, was in itself enough to excuse a suspicion which was certainly at variance with my knowledge of A. J. Raffles.

"What did he say?" I inquired mechanically, divining some subtler explanation of this visit, and wondering what on earth it could be.

"Say?" cried Raffles. "What did he not say! He boasted of his vice, he bragged of his riches, and he blackguarded society for taking him up for his money and dropping him out of sheer pique and jealousy because he had so much. He mentioned names, too, with the most charming freedom, and swore he was as good a man as the Old Country had to show—*pace* the Old Bohemians. To prove it he pointed to a great diamond in the middle of his shirt-front with a little finger loaded with another just like it: which of our bloated princes could show a pair like that? As a matter of fact, they seemed quite wonderful stones, with a curious purple gleam to them that must mean a pot of money. But old Rosenthall swore he wouldn't take fifty thousand pounds for the two, and wanted to know where the other man was who went about with twenty-five thousand in his shirt-front, and the other twenty-five on his little finger. He didn't exist. If he did, he wouldn't have the pluck to wear them. But he had—he'd tell us why. And before you could say Jack Robinson he had whipped out a whacking great revolver!"

"Not at the table?"

"At the table! In the middle of his speech! But it was nothing to what he wanted to do. He actually wanted us to let him write his name in bullets on the opposite wall to show us why he wasn't afraid to go about in all his diamonds! That brute Purvis, the prize-fighter, who is his paid bully, had to bully his master before he could be persuaded out of it. There was quite a panic for the moment; one fellow was saying his prayers under the table, and the waiters bolted to a man."

"What a grotesque scene!"

"Grotesque enough, but I rather wish they had let him go the whole hog and blaze away. He was as keen as knives to show us how he could take care of his purple diamonds; and, do you know, Bunny, I was as keen as knives to see."

And Raffles leant towards me with a sly, slow smile that made the hidden meaning of his visit only too plain to me at last.

"So you think of having a try for his diamonds yourself?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is horribly obvious, I admit. But—yes, I have set my heart upon them! To be quite frank, I have had them on my conscience for some time; one couldn't hear so much of the man, and his prize-fighter, and his diamonds, without feeling it a kind of duty to have a go for them; but when it comes to brandishing a revolver and practically challenging the world, the thing becomes inevitable. It is simply thrust upon one. I was fated to hear that challenge, Bunny, and I, for one, must take it up. I was only sorry I couldn't get on my hind legs and say so then and there."

"Well," I said, "I don't see the necessity as things are with us; but, of course, I'm your man."

My tone may have been half-hearted. I did my best to make it otherwise. But it was barely a month since our Bond Street exploit, and we certainly could have afforded to behave ourselves for some time to come. We

had been getting along so nicely: by his advice I had scribbled a thing or two; inspired by Raffles, I had even done an article on our own jewel robbery; and for the moment I was quite satisfied with this sort of adventure. I thought we ought to know when we were well off, and could see no point in our running fresh risks before we were obliged. On the other hand, I was anxious not to show the least disposition to break the pledge that I had given a month ago. But it was not on my manifest disinclination that Raffles fastened.

"Necessity, my dear Bunny? Does the writer only write when the wolf is at the door? Does the painter paint for bread alone? Must you and I be driven to crime like Tom of Bow and Dick of Whitechapel? You pain me, my dear chap; you needn't laugh, because you do. Art for art's sake is a vile catchword, but I confess it appeals to me. In this case my motives are absolutely pure, for I doubt if we shall ever be able to dispose of such peculiar stones. But if I don't have a try for them—after to-night, I shall never be able to hold up my head again."

His eye twinkled, but it glittered too.

"We shall have our work cut out," was all I said.

"And do you suppose I should be keen on it if we hadn't?" cried Raffles. "My dear fellow, I would rob St. Paul's Cathedral if I could, but I could no more scoop a till when the shopwalker wasn't looking than I could bag apples out of an old woman's basket. Even that little business last month was a sordid affair, but it was necessary, and I think its strategy redeemed it to some extent. Now there's some credit, and more sport, in going where they boast they're on their guard against you. The Bank of England, for example, is the ideal crib; but that would need half a dozen of us with years to give to the job; and meanwhile Reuben Rosenthall is high enough game for you and me. We know he's armed. We know how Billy Purvis can fight. It'll be no soft thing, I grant you. But what of that, my good Bunny—

what of that? A man's reach must exceed his grasp, dear boy, or what the dickens is a heaven for?"

"I would rather we didn't exceed ours just yet," I answered, laughing, for his spirit was irresistible, and the plan was growing upon me, despite my qualms.

"Trust me for that," was his reply; "I'll see you through. After all, I expect to find that the difficulties are nearly all on the surface. These fellows both drink like the devil, and that should simplify matters considerably. But we shall see, and we must take our time. There will probably turn out to be a dozen different ways in which the thing might be done, and we shall have to choose between them. It will mean watching the house for at least a week in any case; it may mean lots of other things that will take much longer; but give me a week, and I will tell you more. That's to say if you're really on?"

"Of course I am," I replied indignantly. "But why should I give you a week? Why shouldn't we watch the house together?"

"Because two eyes are as good as four, and take up less room. Never hunt in couples unless you're obliged. But don't you look offended, Bunny; there'll be plenty for you to do when the time comes, that I promise you. You shall have your share of the fun, never fear, and a purple diamond all to yourself—if we're lucky."

On the whole, however, this conversation left me less than lukewarm, and I still remember the depression which came over me when Raffles was gone. I saw the folly of the enterprise to which I had committed myself—the sheer, gratuitous, unnecessary folly of it. And the paradoxes in which Raffles revelled, and the frivolous casuistry which was nevertheless half sincere, and which his mere personality rendered wholly plausible at the moment of utterance, appealed very little to me when recalled in cold blood. I admired the spirit of pure mischief in which he seemed prepared to risk his liberty and his life, but I did not find it an infectious spirit on calm reflection. Yet the thought of withdrawal was not to be

entertained for a moment. On the contrary, I was impatient of the delay ordained by Raffles; and, perhaps, no small part of my secret disaffection came of his galling determination to do without me until the last moment.

It made it no better that this was characteristic of the man and of his attitude towards me. For a month we had been, I suppose, the thickest thieves in all London, and yet our intimacy was curiously incomplete. With all his charming frankness, there was in Raffles a vein of capricious reserve which was perceptible enough to be very irritating. He had the instinctive secretiveness of the inveterate criminal. He would make mysteries of matters of common concern; for example, I never knew how or where he disposed of the Bond Street jewels, on the proceeds of which we were both still leading the outward lives of hundreds of other young fellows about town. He was consistently mysterious about that and other details, of which it seemed to me that I had already earned the right to know everything. I could not but remember how he had led me into my first felony, by means of a trick, while yet uncertain whether he could trust me or not. That I could no longer afford to resent, but I did resent his want of confidence in me now. I said nothing about it, but it rankled every day, and never more than in the week that succeeded the Rosenthall dinner. When I met Raffles at the club he would tell me nothing; when I went to his rooms he was out, or pretended to be. One day he told me he was getting on well, but slowly; it was a more ticklish game than he had thought; but when I began to ask questions he would say no more. Then and there, in my annoyance, I took my own decision. Since he would tell me nothing of the result of his vigils, I determined to keep one on my own account, and that very evening found my way to the millionaire's front gates.

The house he was occupying is, I believe, quite the largest in the St. John's Wood district. It stands in the angle formed by two broad thoroughfares, neither of which, as it happens, is a 'bus route, and I doubt if many quieter

spots exist within the four-mile radius. Quiet also was the great square house, in its garden of grass-plots and shrubs; the lights were low, the millionaire and his friends obviously spending their evening elsewhere. The garden walls were only a few feet high. In one there was a side door opening into a glass passage; in the other two five-barred grained-and-varnished gates, one at either end of the little semi-circular drive, and both wide open. So still was the place that I had a great mind to walk boldly in and learn something of the premises; in fact, I was on the point of doing so, when I heard a quick, shuffling step on the pavement behind me. I turned round and faced the dark scowl and the dirty clenched fists of a dilapidated tramp.

"You fool!" said he. "You utter idiot!"

"Raffles!"

"That's it," he whispered savagely; "tell all the neighbourhood—give me away at the top of your voice!"

With that he turned his back upon me, and shambled down the road, shrugging his shoulders and muttering to himself as though I had refused him alms. A few moments I stood astounded, indignant, at a loss; then I followed him. His feet trailed, his knees gave, his back was bowed, his head kept nodding; it was the gait of a man eighty years of age. Presently he waited for me midway between two lamp-posts. As I came up he was lighting rank tobacco, in a cutty pipe, with an evil-smelling match, and the flame showed me the suspicion of a smile.

"You must forgive my heat, Bunny, but it really was very foolish of you. Here am I trying every dodge—begging at the door one night—hiding in the shrubs the next—doing every mortal thing but stand and stare at the house as you went and did. It's a costume piece, and in you rush in your ordinary clothes. I tell you they're on the look-out for us night and day. It's the toughest nut I ever tackled!"

"Well," said I, "if you had told me so before I shouldn't have come. You told me nothing."

He looked hard at me from under the broken rim of a battered billycock.

"You're right," he said at length. "I've been too close. It's become second nature with me, when I've anything on. But here's an end of it, Bunny, so far as you're concerned. I'm going home now, and I want you to follow me; but for heaven's sake keep your distance, and don't speak to me again till I speak to you. There—give me a start." And he was off again, a decrepit vagabond, with his hands in his pockets, his elbows squared, and frayed coat-tails swinging raggedly from side to side.

I followed him to the Finchley Road. There he took an omnibus, and I sat some rows behind him on the top, but not far enough to escape the pest of his vile tobacco. That he could carry his character-sketch to such a pitch —he who would only smoke one brand of cigarettes! It was the last, least touch of the insatiable artist, and it charmed away what mortification there still remained in me. Once more I felt the fascination of a comrade who was for ever dazzling one with a fresh and unsuspected facet of his character.

As we neared Piccadilly I wondered what he would do. Surely he was not going into the Albany like that? No, he took another omnibus to Sloane Street, I sitting behind him as before. At Sloane Street we changed again, and were presently in the long lean artery of the King's Road. I was now all agog to know our destination, nor was I kept many more minutes in doubt. Raffles got down. I followed. He crossed the road and disappeared up a dark turning. I pressed after him, and was in time to see his coat-tails as he plunged into a still darker flagged alley to the right. He was holding himself up and stepping out like a young man once more; also, in some subtle way, he already looked less disreputable. But I alone was there to see him, the alley was absolutely deserted, and desperately dark. At the farther end he opened a door with a latchkey, and it was darker yet within.

Instinctively I drew back and heard him chuckle. We could no longer see each other.

"All right, Bunny! There's no hanky-panky this time. These are studios, my friend, and I'm one of the lawful tenants."

Indeed, in another minute we were in a lofty room with skylight, easels, dressing-cupboard, platform, and every other adjunct save the signs of actual labour. The first thing I saw, as Raffles lit the gas, was its reflection in his silk hat on the pegs beside the rest of his normal garments.

"Looking for the works of art?" continued Raffles, lighting a cigarette and beginning to divest himself of his rags. "I'm afraid you won't find any, but there's the canvas I'm always going to make a start upon. I tell them I'm looking high and low for my ideal model. I have the stove lit on principle twice a week, and look in and leave a newspaper and a smell of Sullivans—how good they are after shag! Meanwhile I pay my rent and am a good tenant in every way; and it's a very useful little *pied-à-terre*—there's no saying how useful it might be at a pinch. As it is, the billycock comes in and the topper goes out, and nobody takes the slightest notice of either; at this time of night the chances are that there's not a soul in the building except ourselves."

"You never told me you went in for disguises," said I, watching him as he cleansed the grime from his face and hands.

"No, Bunny, I've treated you very shabbily all round. There was really no reason why I shouldn't have shown you this place a month ago, and yet there was no point in my doing so, and circumstances are just conceivable in which it would have suited us both for you to be in genuine ignorance of my whereabouts. I have something to sleep on, as you perceive, in case of need, and, of course, my name is not Raffles in the King's Road. So you will see that one might bolt farther and fare worse."

"Meanwhile you use the place as a dressing-room?"

"It's my private pavilion," said Raffles. "Disguises? In

some cases they're half the battle, and it's always pleasant to feel that, if the worst comes to the worst, you needn't necessarily be convicted under your own name. Then they're indispensable in dealing with the fences. I drive all my bargains in the tongue and raiment of Shoreditch. If I didn't there'd be the very devil to pay in blackmail. Now, this cupboard's full of all sorts of toggery. I tell the woman who cleans the room that it's for my models when I find 'em. By the way, I only hope I've got something that'll fit you, for you'll want a rig for to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!" I exclaimed. "Why, what do you mean to do?"

"The trick," said Raffles. "I intended writing to you as soon as I got back to my rooms, to ask you to look me up to-morrow afternoon; then I was going to unfold my plan of campaign, and take you straight into action then and there. There's nothing like putting the nervous players in first; it's the sitting with their pads on that upsets their applecart; that was another of my reasons for being so confoundedly close. You must try to forgive me. I couldn't help remembering how well you played up last trip, without any time to weaken on it beforehand. All I want is for you to be as cool and smart to-morrow night as you were then; though, by Jove, there's no comparison between the two cases!"

"I thought you would find it so."

"You were right. I have. Mind you, I don't say this will be the tougher job all round; we shall probably get in without any difficulty at all; it's the getting out again that may flummux us. That's the worst of an irregular household!" cried Raffles, with quite a burst of virtuous indignation. "I assure you, Bunny, I spent the whole of Monday night in the shrubbery of the garden next door, looking over the wall, and, if you'll believe me, somebody was about all night long! I don't mean the Kaffirs. I don't believe they ever get to bed at all, poor devils! No. I mean Rosenthall himself, and that pasty-faced beast Purvis. They were up and drinking from

midnight, when they came in, to broad daylight, when I cleared out. Even then I left them sober enough to slang each other. By the way, they very nearly came to blows in the garden, within a few yards of me, and I heard something that might come in useful and make Rosenthall shoot crooked at a critical moment. You know what an I. D. B. is?"

"Illicit Diamond Buyer?"

"Exactly. Well, it seems that Rosenthall was one. He must have let it out to Purvis in his cups. Anyhow, I heard Purvis taunting him with it, and threatening him with the breakwater at Capetown; and I begin to think our friends are friend and foe. But about to-morrow night: there's nothing subtle in my plan. It's simply to get in while these fellows are out on the loose, and to lie low till they come back, and longer. If possible we must doctor the whisky. That would simplify the whole thing, though it's not a very sporting game to play; still, we must remember Rosenthall's revolver; we don't want him to sign his name on us. With all those Kaffirs about, however, it's ten to one on the whisky, and a hundred to one against us if we go looking for it. A brush with the heathen would spoil everything, if it did no more. Besides, there are the ladies——"

"The deuce there are!"

"Ladies with an 'i,' and the very voices for raising Cain. I fear, I fear the clamour! It would be fatal to us. *Au contraire*, if we can manage to stow ourselves away unbeknowns, half the battle will be won. If Rosenthall turns in drunk, it's a purple diamond apiece. If he sits up sober, it may be a bullet instead. We will hope not, Bunny; and all the firing wouldn't be on one side; but it's on the knees of the gods."

And so we left it when we shook hands in Piccadilly —not by any means as much later as I could have wished. Raffles would not ask me to his rooms that night. He said he made it a rule to have a long night before playing cricket and—other games. His final word to me was framed on the same principle.

"Mind, only one drink to-night, Bunny. Two at the outside—as you value your life—and mine!"

I remember my abject obedience, and the endless, sleepless night it gave me; and the roofs of the houses opposite standing out at last against the blue-grey London dawn. I wondered whether I should ever see another, and was very hard on myself for that little expedition which I had made on my own wilful account.

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening when we took up our position in the garden adjoining that of Reuben Rosenthall; the house itself was shut up, thanks to the outrageous libertine next door, who, by driving away the neighbours, had gone far towards delivering himself into our hands. Practically secure from surprise on that side, we could watch our house under cover of a wall just high enough to see over, while a fair margin of shrubs in either garden afforded us additional protection. Thus entrenched we had stood an hour, watching a pair of lighted bow-windows with vague shadows flitting continually across the blinds, and listening to the drawing of corks, the clink of glasses, and a gradual crescendo of coarse voices within. Our luck seemed to have deserted us: the owner of the purple diamonds was dining at home and dining at undue length. I thought it was a dinner-party. Raffles differed; in the end he proved right. Wheels grated in the drive, a carriage and pair stood at the steps; there was a stampede from the dining-room, and the loud voices died away, to burst forth presently from the porch.

Let me make our position perfectly clear. We were over the wall, at the side of the house, but a few feet from the dining-room windows. On our right, one angle of the building cut the back lawn in two diagonally; on our left another angle just permitted us to see the jutting steps and the waiting carriage. We saw Rosenthall come out—saw the glimmer of his diamonds before anything. Then came the pugilist; then a lady with a head of hair like a bath sponge: then another, and the party was complete.

Raffles ducked and pulled me down in great excitement.

"The ladies are going with them," he whispered. "This is great!"

"That's better still."

"The Gardenia!" the millionaire had bawled.

"And that's best of all," said Raffles, standing upright as hoofs and wheels crunched through the gates and rattled off at a fine speed.

"Now what?" I whispered, trembling with excitement.

"They'll be clearing away. Yes, here come their shadows. The drawing-room windows open on the lawn. Bunny, it's the psychological moment. Where's that mask?"

I produced it with a hand whose trembling I tried in vain to still, and could have died for Raffles when he made no comment on what he could not fail to notice. His own hands were firm and cool as he adjusted my mask for me, and then his own.

"By Jove, old boy," he whispered cheerily, "you look about the greatest ruffian I ever saw! These masks alone will down a nigger, if we meet one. But I'm glad I remembered to tell you not to shave. You'll pass for Whitechapel if the worst comes to the worst and you don't forget to talk the lingo. Better sulk like a mule if you're not sure of it, and leave the dialogue to me; but, please our stars, there will be no need. Now, are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Got your gag?"

"Yes."

"Shooter?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me."

In an instant we were over the wall, in another on the lawn behind the house. There was no moon. The very stars in their courses had veiled themselves for our benefit. I crept at my leader's heels to some French windows

opening upon a shallow verandah. He pushed. They yielded.

"Luck again," he whispered; "nothing but luck! Now for a light!"

And the light came!

A good score of electric burners glowed red for the fraction of a second, then rained merciless white beams into our blinded eyes. When we found our sight, four revolvers covered us, and between two of them the colossal frame of Reuben Rosenthall shook with a wheezy laughter from head to foot.

"Good evening, boys," he hiccoughed. "Glad to see ye at last! Shift foot or finger, you on the left, though, and you're a dead boy. I mean you, you greaser!" he roared out at Raffles. "I know you. I've been waitin' for you. I've been watchin' you all this week! Plucky smart you thought yerself, didn't you? One day beggin', next time shammin' tight, and next one o' them old pals from Kimberley what never come when I'm in. But you left the same tracks every day, you buggins, an' the same tracks every night, all round the blessed premises."

"All right, guv'nor," drawled Raffles; "don't excite. It's a fair cop. We don't sweat to know 'ow you brung it orf. On'y don't you go for to shoot, 'cos we 'aint awmed, s'help me Gord!"

"Ah, you're a knowin' one," said Rosenthall, fingering his triggers. "But you've struck a knowin'er."

"Ho, yuss, we know all abaht thet! Set a thief to catch a thief—ho, yuss."

My eyes had torn themselves from the round black muzzles, from the accursed diamonds that had been our snare, the pasty pig-face of the over-fed pugilist, and the flaming cheeks and hook nose of Rosenthall himself. I was looking beyond them at the doorway filled with quivering silk and plush, black faces, white eye-balls, woolly pates. But a sudden silence recalled my attention to the millionaire. And only his nose retained its colour.

"What d'ye mean?" he whispered with a hoarse oath. "Spit it out, or, by Christmas, I'll drill you!"

"Whort price thet brikewater?" drawled Raffles, coolly.

"Eh?"

Rosenthall's revolvers were describing widening orbits.

"What price thet brikewater—old I. D. B.?"

"Where in hell did you get hold o' that?" asked Rosenthall, with a rattle in his thick neck meant for mirth.

"You may well arst," says Raffles. "It's all over the plice w'ere I come from."

"Who can have spread such rot?"

"I dunno," says Raffles; "arst the gen'leman on yer left; p'raps 'e knows."

The gentleman on his left had turned livid with emotion. Guilty conscience never declared itself in plainer terms. For a moment his small eyes bulged like currants in the suet of his face; the next, he had pocketed his pistols on a professional instinct, and was upon us with his fists.

"Out o' the light—out o' the light!" yelled Rosenthall in a frenzy.

He was too late. No sooner had the burly pugilist obstructed his fire than Raffles was through the window at a bound; while I, for standing still and saying nothing, was scientifically felled to the floor.

I cannot have been many moments without my senses. When I recovered them there was a great to-do in the garden, but I had the drawing-room to myself. I sat up. Rosenthall and Purvis were rushing about outside, cursing the Kaffirs and nagging at each other.

"Over that wall, I tell yer!"

"I tell you it was this one. Can't you whistle for the police?"

"Police be damned! I've had enough of the blessed police."

"Then we'd better get back and make sure of the other rotter."

"Oh, make sure o' yer skin. That's what you'd better do. Jala, you black hog, if I catch you skulkin' . . ."

I never heard the threat. I was creeping from the

drawing-room on my hands and knees, my own revolver swinging by its steel ring from my teeth.

For an instant I thought that the hall also was deserted. I was wrong, and I crept upon a Kaffir on all fours. Poor devil, I could not bring myself to deal him a base blow, but I threatened him most hideously with my revolver, and left the white teeth chattering in his black head as I took the stairs three at a time. Why I went upstairs in that decisive fashion, as though it were my only course, I cannot explain. But garden and ground floor seemed alive with men and I might have done worse.

I turned into the first room I came to. It was a bedroom—empty, though lit up; and never shall I forget how I started as I entered, on encountering the awful villain that was myself at full length in a pier-glass! Masked, armed, and ragged, I was indeed fit carrion for a bullet or the hangman, and to one or the other I made up my mind. Nevertheless, I hid myself in the wardrobe behind the mirror, and there I stood shivering and cursing my fate, my folly, and Raffles most of all—Raffles first and last—for I daresay half an hour. Then the wardrobe door was flung suddenly open; they had stolen into the room without a sound; and I was hauled downstairs, an ignominious captive.

Gross scenes followed in the hall. The ladies were now upon the stage, and at sight of the desperate criminal they screamed with one accord. In truth I must have given them fair cause, though my mask was now torn away and hid nothing but my left ear. Rosenthall answered their shrieks with a roar for silence; the woman with the bath-sponge hair swore at him shrilly in return; the place became a Babel impossible to describe. I remember wondering how long it would be before the police appeared. Purvis and the ladies were for calling them in and giving me in charge without delay. Rosenthall would not hear of it. He swore that he would shoot man or woman who left his sight. He had had enough of the police. He was not going to have them

coming there to spoil sport; he was going to deal with me in his own way. With that he dragged me from all other hands, flung me against a door, and sent a bullet crashing through the wood within an inch of my ear.

"You drunken fool! It'll be murder!" shouted Purvis, getting in the way a second time.

"Wha' do I care? He's armed, isn't he? I shot him in self-defence. It'll be a warning to others. Will you stand aside, or d'ye want it yourself?"

"You're drunk," said Purvis, still between us. "I saw you take a neat tumblerful since you came in, and it's made you drunk as a fool. Pull yourself together, old man. You ain't a-going to do what you'll be sorry for."

"Then I won't shoot at him, I'll only shoot roun' an' roun' the beggar. You're quite right, ole feller. Wouldn't hurt him. Great mishtake. Roun' an' roun'. There—like that!"

His freckled paw shot up over Purvis's shoulder, mauve lightning came from his ring, a red flash from his revolver, and shrieks from the women as the reverberations died away. Some splinters lodged in my hair.

Next instant the prize-fighter disarmed him; and I was safe from the devil, but finally doomed to the deep sea. A policeman was in our midst. He had entered through the drawing-room window; he was an officer of few words and creditable promptitude. In a twinkling he had the handcuffs on my wrist, while the pugilist explained the situation, and his patron reviled the force and its representative with impotent malignity. A fine watch they kept; a lot of good they did; coming in when all was over and the whole household might have been murdered in their sleep. The officer only deigned to notice him as he marched me off.

"We know all about you, sir," said he contemptuously, and he refused the sovereign Purvis proffered. "You will be seeing me again, sir, at Marylebone."

"Shall I come now?"

"As you please, sir. I rather think the other gentleman

requires you more, and I don't fancy this young man means to give much trouble."

"Oh, I'm coming quietly," I said.

And I went.

In silence we traversed perhaps a hundred yards. It must have been midnight. We did not meet a soul. At last I whispered:

"How on earth did you manage it?"

"Purely by luck," said Raffles. "I had the luck to get clear away through knowing every brick of those back-garden walls, and the double luck to have these togs with the rest over at Chelsea. The helmet is one of a collection I made up at Oxford; here it goes over this wall, and we'd better carry the coat and belt before we meet a real officer. I got them once for a fancy ball—ostensibly—and thereby hangs a yarn. I always thought they might come in useful a second time. My chief crux to-night was getting rid of the cab that brought me back. I sent him off to Scotland Yard with ten bob and a special message to good old Mackenzie. The whole detective department will be at Rosenthall's in about half an hour. Of course I speculated on our gentleman's hatred of the police—another huge slice of luck. If you'd got away, well and good; if not, I felt he was the man to play with his mouse as long as possible. Yes, Bunny, it's been more of a costume piece than I intended, and we've come out of it, with a good deal less credit. But, by Jove, we're jolly lucky to have come out of it at all!"

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